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TODAY'S FACES OF RACISM

Echoes From Elsewhere

An Introduction To Echoes Magazine In Reactions, Facts and Issues From All Over The World

In memory of Te Rua Winiata

It was with deep shock and sadness that the WCC received the news of the death of Te Rua Winiata from Aotearoa-New Zealand. From 1991-97 she was a member of the Justice, Peace and Creation Commission. During that time she played a significant role in the development of the Indigenous Peoples' Programme. She was often quoted here in ECHOES.

Writes acting WCC cluster director Aruna Gnanadason, "We who have had the privilege of working with her and knowing her many skills will miss her and the great contribution she made to our common work. We remember her as a dynamic woman leader of the Church, but also as a woman of immense compassion and strength. She was an asset to the work on justice, peace and creation and to the Indigenous People's programme – to each of which she brought humour, sensitivity and great commitment.

We had been negotiating with her to work with us on the internationally constituted Reference Group for the soon-to-be-launched Decade to Overcome Violence, which had its first meeting

in May this year, when we heard the news of her death. We have lost her contribution to this process.

A mighty tree has fallen, and for this there can be no substitute. We can only be faithful to her memory by living up to the example she was to us all."

Suicide Seeds on the Fast Track

A report released by the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) reveals that Terminator and Traitor technology are riding a fast track to commercialisation.

Terminator technology, the genetic engineering of plants to produce sterile seeds, is universally considered the most morally offensive application of agricultural biotechnology, since over 1.4 billion people depend on farm-saved seeds.

"After Monsanto and AstraZeneca publicly vowed not to commercialise terminator seeds in 1999, governments and civil society organisations were lulled into thinking that the crisis had passed. Nothing could be further from the truth," said RAFI's Executive Director Pat Mooney. "Despite mounting opposition from national governments and United Nations' agencies, research on Terminator and Traitor (genetic trait control) is moving full speed ahead."

And despite massive protests, the US Department of Agriculture supports and defends its anti-farmer patent and research on suicide seeds.

The Director General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Jacques Diouf recently declared his opposition to Terminator. In publicly rejecting Terminator, Diouf has come to the defence of the 1.4 billion people who depend upon farm-saved seed for their survival.

Among the national governments that have announced their intention to oppose Terminator technology are Panama, India, Ghana, and Uganda.

According to RAFI, the future of Terminator/Traitor Technology rests with national governments and multinational corporations. The pressure points for political action are, first and foremost, with national governments around the world. Second, pressure should be applied at key international fora such as through the BioSafety Protocol at the Convention on Biological Diversity, and intellectual property negotiations at the World Trade Organisation.

"Terminator has grabbed the spotlight, but we are equally concerned about the closely related genetic trait control technologies (Traitor Tech) which enables a plant's genetic traits to be turned on or off with the application of an external chemical – the company's proprietary chemical," adds Ribeiro. "Although the USDA and Delta & Pine Land are the high-profile crusaders, the goal of genetic trait control is industry-wide," concludes Silvia Ribeiro, RAFI Programme Officer.

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Visible links:

1. http://www.rafi.org/
2. mailto:rafi@rafi.org
3. mailto:panna@panna.org
4. http://www.panna.org/
5. mailto:panups-subscribe@igc.topica.com
6. http://204.255.211.112/ColdFusion/news_top10.cfm?start=1

Hidden links:

7. http://204.255.211.112/ColdFusion/News_Page1.cfm?NewsID=9657&start=1

In May, 2000 RAFI released a status report on Terminator and Traitor patents, which will examine the current goals of private and public sector institutions that are promoting bioserfdom with genetic trait control technology.

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Editorial

Echoes
justice, peace and creation news

Echoes is an occasional publication of the World Council of Churches' cluster on "Issues and Themes", Justice, Peace and Creation team.

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The roots of racism are deeply embedded in our global system. There is no hiding place. There are no safety zones; there is no sacred space. The violence of racism is institutional and structural; it is personal and communal, causing untold misery and death. It pervades our values and constricts our creativity.

The roots are so deep that they have taken hold of all of us, and we no longer seem to be able to see or act clearly when the issue of race hits the table. The roots are connected to centuries of conquest, genocide, and slavery, as well as centuries of exploitation and oppression.

As an African American growing up in the southern region of the United States, I experienced first-hand the reality that racism breaks, divides, dehumanises and that it destroys individuals and communities. Its purpose is to protect White power and privilege and to disempower communities of Colour. It functions as a demonic force with devastating consequences.

This was the grounding of my understanding when I became a member of the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1984.The work of PCR was known to me as a result of its significant stance against apartheid in South Africa.

PCR was launched as a result of a speech by James Baldwin (a noted African American author) to the 1968 WCC Uppsala Assembly. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been invited to address that Assembly. However, an assassin's bullet ended his life in April 1968. James Baldwin was asked to step into his place, and it was the powerful word that he delivered, combined with the magnitude of the Civil Rights movement being waged on the ground in the United States, and the continuing struggle against apartheid in South Africa, that prompted that body in a decisive voice to proclaim:

"...that racism was a powerful ideology maintained by economic and political structures which function at all levels of society. It further singled out White racism as the primary proponent of discrimination and declared the need for an urgent programme to guide the Council and its member churches on racism."

By the time the twenty-first century began, I found myself growing in the depth with which I understood racism from an international perspective. In 1984 racism – according to my definition – was primarily a Black White issue. As I live and move in this millennium, I carry with me a deeper understanding of the ways in which the demonic nature of this sin is being experienced around the globe. I see the many faces of it as I remember the sisters and brothers from many places and spaces who sat with me around a common table as PCR Commissioners and later as Commissioners of the Programme Unit on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. As you read this publication, I hope you will see the connections and the demonic threads that racism continues to weave around the globe.

As the meaning of this publication continues to unfold, it is imperative that the WCC and its member churches, as well as movement groups that use it, take it as their marching guide into the twenty-first century. If we are to make the connections that will allow us to win the ongoing fight around the world to eliminate racism, we must function in new ways. Barney Pityana calls us to a redefining of racism, and Maria-Cristina Ventura calls us to a theological deconstruction and reconstruction that involves questioning and confronting theology.

This means a time of turning for us as individuals and churches. We cannot continue with business as usual. To embrace the freedom of God is to stand on free ground – it is to recognise that we are not captive to the old order. Rather, God is calling us to new ways of looking at things, new ways of feeling and new ways of living. Isaiah 43: 19 reminds that God is calling us to leave the old behaviour and to join the God of the twenty-first century who is doing a new thing.

For me, the new involves taking racism out of the box of simply a Black and White context. It is that! But it is more. It is the more that this publication unpacks. When we see the connections, understand that the struggle is not just local, but that it is global and come face to face with the reality that racism is a demonic power that must be discerned, unmasked and engaged – we may be able to combat racism in our lifetime.

Yvonne V. Delk

ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM: OLD WINE IN A NEW BOTTLE

By Dr Deborah M. Robinson

Photo: Rick Reinhard, WCC.

This short article reviews the history of the environmental justice movement in the United States, provides examples of environmental racism in the US as well as globally, and concludes with a discussion of the World Conference Against Racism and the opportunity it provides to place firmly this newer manifestation of racism on the international agenda.

Environmental racism can be defined as:
Racial discrimination in environmental policy making and the enforcement of regulations and laws; the deliberate targeting of people of Colour communities for toxic and hazardous waste facilities; the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities; and the history of excluding people of colour from the leadership of the environmental movement.[1]

Others have added to that definition by saying environmental racism refers to "any government, institutional, or industry action, or failure to act, that has a negative environmental impact which disproportionately harms – *whether intentionally or unintentionally* – individuals, groups, or communities based on race or colour." [2]

It is important though, to understand environmental racism in an historical context. "The exploitation of people of colour has taken the form of genocide, chattel slavery, indentured servitude and racial discrimination – in employment, housing and practically all aspects of life. Today we suffer from the remnants of this sordid history, as well as from new and institutionalised forms of racism, facilitated by the massive post-World War II expansion of the petrochemical industry." [3]

In the United States, the victims of environmental racism are African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders, who are more likely than Whites to live in environmentally hazardous conditions. Three out of five African Americans live in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites. Native American lands and sa-

cred places are home to extensive mining operations and radioactive waste sites. Three of the five largest commercial hazardous waste landfills are located in predominantly African American and Latino communities. As a consequence, the residents of these communities suffer shorter life spans, higher infant and adult mortality, poor health, poverty, diminished economic opportunities, substandard housing, and an overall degraded quality of life.

Environmental racism, therefore, is a new manifestation of historic racial oppression. It is merely "old wine in a new bottle."

For more than a decade environmental racism in the United States has been well-documented by NGOs, universities, and even the US government. However, the government has provided no effective remedies to the victims of these racist practices, nor has it taken effective action to stop such practices from occurring in the future.

Many people trace the birth of the environmental justice movement in the United States to the 1991 First National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit held in Washington, DC, but there were many important antecedents to this event. In 1982, North Carolina State officials decided to locate a PCB (polychlorinated-biphenyl) landfill in a predominately African American community. In response, protestors lay down in the streets trying to block trucks carrying the toxic waste to the landfill and over 500 people were arrested. This act of civil disobedience was the first time anyone was jailed for trying to halt a toxic waste landfill.[4]

One of those arrested was US Congressman Walter Fauntroy. He later asked the US General Accounting Office (a federal agency) to determine the correlation between the location of hazardous waste landfills and the racial and economic status of the surrounding communities in that region. The GAO study concluded that, "Blacks make up the majority of the population in three out of four communities where landfills are located."[5]

The landmark 1987 report by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, Toxic Wastes and Race, extended the GAO study. It was based on a national study that mapped the location of toxic waste sites and the racial composition of the community. They found that people of colour were twice as likely as White people to live in a community with a commercial hazardous waste management facility and three times as likely to live in a community with multiple facilities. Further analysis and studies by others proved that race is the number one predictor of where toxic sites are located.

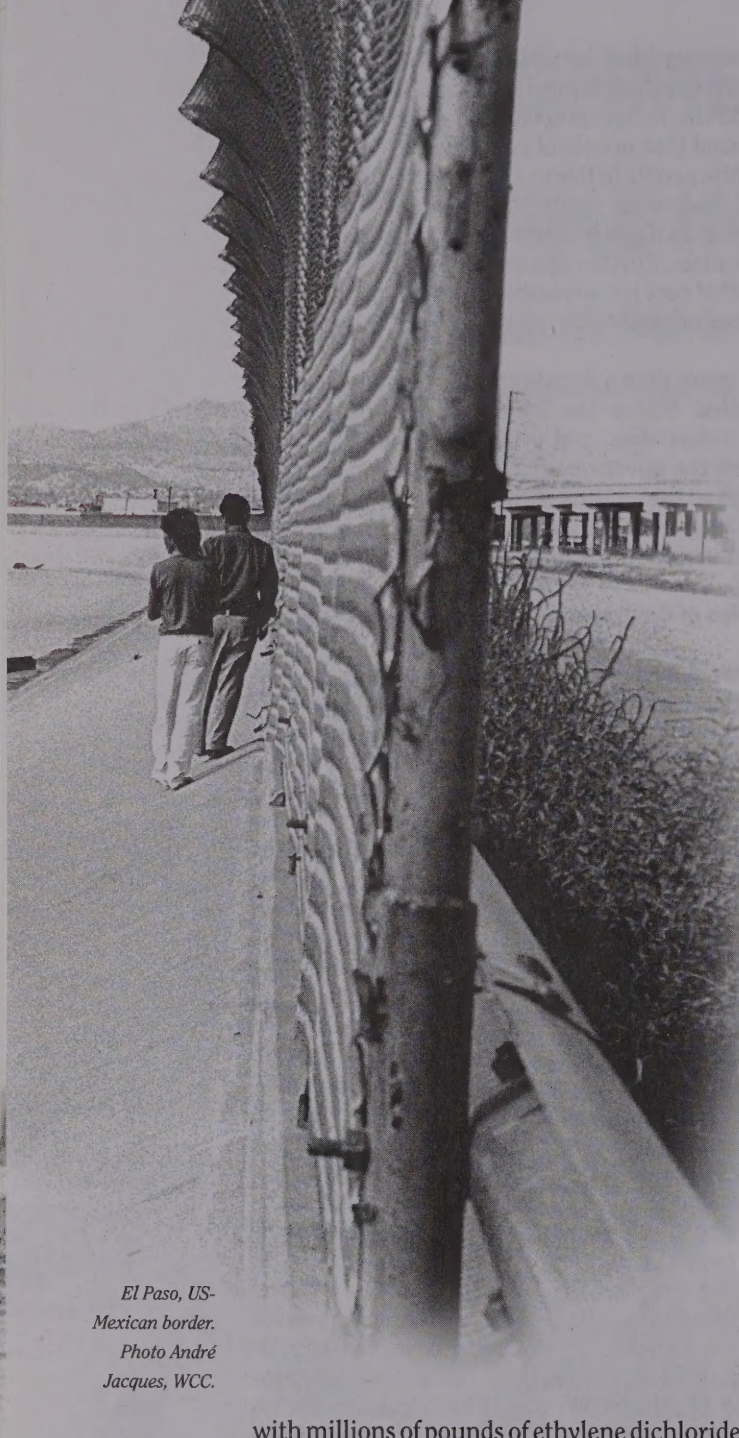
For more than a decade environmental racism in the United States has been well-documented by NGOs, universities, and even the US government.[6] However, the government has provided no effective remedies to the victims of these racist practices, nor has it taken effective action to stop such practices from occurring in the future.

Examples of Environmental Racism in the United States

• **New Mexico** - Farm workers work on crops that are treated with toxic pesticides and pesticide exposure can result in death, birth defects, cancer, nerve disorders, skin diseases and other problems. The Federal Government has failed to protect farm workers and it was feared that this environmental protection would become weaker under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). "In the case of our farm worker community, the state of New Mexico has committed a tragic injustice by the discriminatory exclusion of agricultural workers from the workers compensation system."[7]

• **Rosebud Reservation, South Dakota**[8] – As state environmental regulations have become more stringent in recent years, Native American reservations have become prime targets of waste disposal firms. As of 1992, the leaders of more than 100 reservations have been approached by such firms. Many waste-disposal companies have attempted to avoid state regulations (which are often tougher than federal regulations) by targeting Native lands. Because of their quasi-independent status, Native American reservations are not covered by state environmental regulations. In 1991, a Connecticut-based company proposed to build a 6,000 acre municipal landfill on Sioux land. Solid waste from other areas would be dumped on Sioux land. Local residents founded the Good Road Coalition and appealed to the Tribal Council to rescind the contract signed with the company. They were able to block construction of the landfill.

• **Mossville, Louisiana** – There are over 30 petrochemical and industrial plants located within a 2-mile area of Mossville (an African American community in rural Louisiana). Condea Vista and PPG, two vinyl companies bordering the community of Mossville, have admitted to contaminating water



El Paso, US-Mexican border. Photo André Jacques, WCC.

with millions of pounds of ethylene dichloride (EDC), a suspected human carcinogen. In November 1999, a United States government health agency issued an alarming report that "dioxin levels are elevated in residents of Mossville"[9]; that the types of dioxin found in the blood of residents "appeared to be locally generated"[10]; and that "local exposures are at least partially responsible for these levels."[11] Dioxin is a persistent organic pollutant and is recognised as the most toxic substance known to science because of its wide variety of destructive effects, including damage to human reproduction, cancer, hormone disruption, and severe impairment of a child's physical and cognitive development.

Environmental Racism on a Global Scale

Many have noted[12] that there is a direct relationship between the increasing globalisation of the economy and environmental degradation of habitats and the living spaces for many of the world's peoples. In many places where Black, minority, poor or Indigenous peoples live, oil, timber and minerals are extracted in such a way as to devastate eco-systems and destroy their culture and livelihood.[13] Waste from both high- and low-tech industries, much of it toxic, has polluted groundwater, soil and the atmosphere. The globalisation of the chemical industry is increasing the levels of persistent organic pollutants, such as dioxin, in the environment. Further, the mobility of corporations has made it possible for them to seek the greatest profit, the least government and environmental regulations, and the best tax incentives, anywhere in the world.

The destructive effects of environmental racism, therefore, are not exclusive to the United States. "Racism and globalisation come together in the environment, with the phenomenon referred to as "global environmental racism" – a manifestation of a policy which has found domestic expression in countries like the United States, but which also has a global dimension."[14] Environmental racism, although not new, is a recent example of the historical double standard as to what is acceptable in certain communities, villages or cities and not in others. One example of this double standard is the environmentally devastating method of extraction of natural resources, utilised by multinational corporations in developing countries. This has been the case with the Ogoni and other peoples of the Niger Delta in Nigeria, the U'wa people of Northeast Columbia, the Amungme of West Papua, Indonesia, the Indigenous People of Burma, and numerous others.

Other Examples of Environmental Racism from a Global Perspective

• **The US Mexican Border** – Approximately 2,000 *maquiladoras* line the US-Mexican border. Corporate headquarters remain north of *la linea* (the line, or border that separates the United States from Mexico), while assembly plants are mushrooming south of the border. Corporations reap record profits, while poor and working communities on both sides of *la linea* are consigned to low-wage jobs and environmental health hazards. The US-Mexico border is a microcosm of North-South relations in a global economy where corporations call the shots, and poor nations sell off labour rights and the environment to the highest bidder. There is no "right to know" law in Mexico, so both workers and communities are denied information about the toxins to which they are exposed. Companies pollute freely, degrading the border environment. Toxic waste, which should be returned to the US or other countries by law, is often

stored on site, posing a health risk to both workers and surrounding communities. Border communities report a deterioration of public health ranging from respiratory problems to skin irritations and neurological disorders believed to be caused by industrial pollution.

• **Nigeria** - The only thing that has changed in the Niger Delta since the return to a civilian government, is that protests have become increasingly violent and some, openly lawless. There has been no meaningful change in the substantive issues facing the minority communities in the Delta; the revenue allocation formula (how the Nigerian government decides to spend the money generated from oil sales) has not changed, gas flaring still goes on 24 hours a day in many communities, oil spills still occur, water is polluted, in some places there is still no electricity, etc. Although this region produces close to two million barrels of oil per day, the region is among the poorest in the country. With oil being 90% of the government's foreign exchange, any demonstrations or disruption of the flow of oil is met with swift reprisals by the police and military.

• **West Papua (Irian Jaya, Indonesia)** - Black people in this Asian-Pacific territory are not only struggling for independence, but are also fighting Freeport-McMoRan which operates one of the world's biggest copper and gold mines there. The region around the mine is closed off to outsiders, as well as to the traditional landowners, who have been dispossessed. The mine has been accused of dumping 130,000 tons of waste rock (known as tailings) a day into local rivers as a means of disposal. The military is used to guard the mine and protect the resources. They have been implicated in numerous human rights violations against the people.

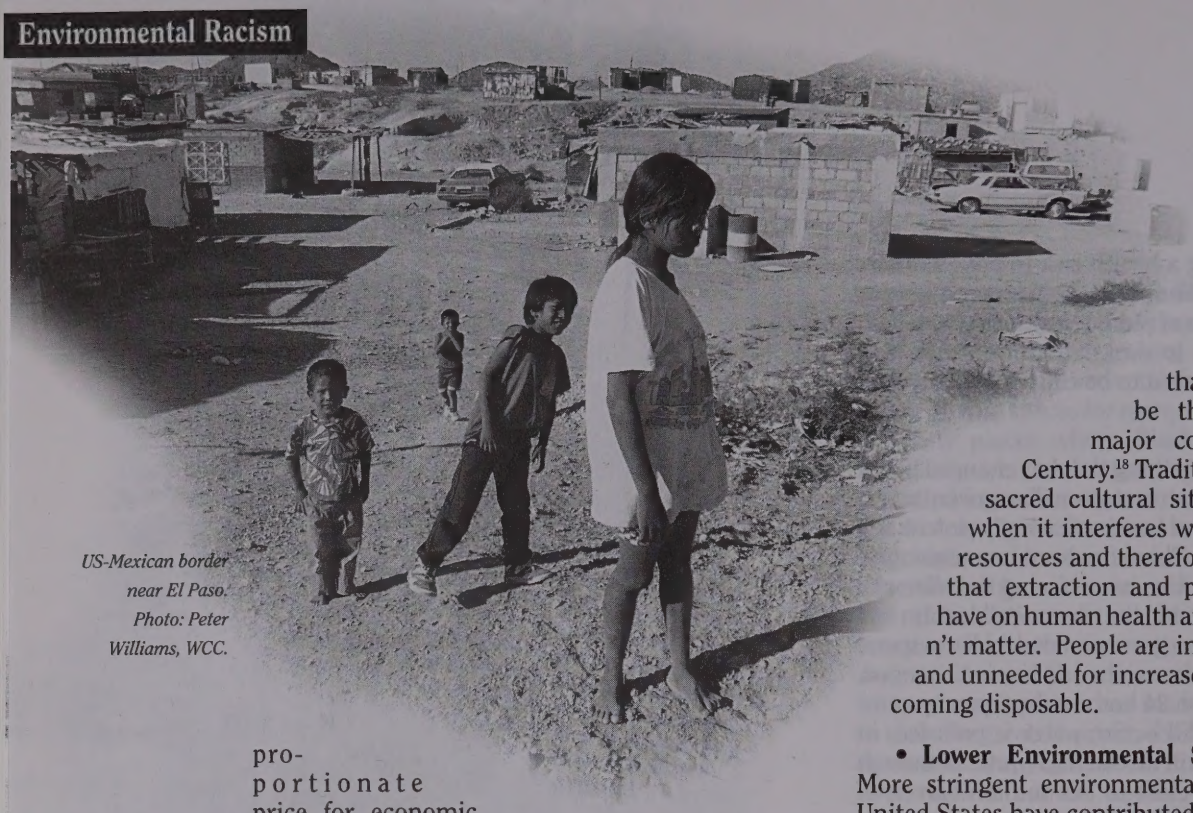
• **Ecuador** - From 1964 to 1990, Texaco, through its subsidiary, Texaco Petroleum Company (TexPet) controlled over 80% of the oil production in Ecuador. In 1993, a $1.5 billion class action suit was filed in New York against Texaco, charging that Texaco improperly dumped large quantities of toxic byproducts into the local rivers, as opposed to utilizing the prevailing industry practice of reinjection; a more expensive, but also a more environmentally sound practice. It is also alleged that Texaco used other improper means of eliminating toxic substances, such as burning them and spreading them on local dirt roads. It is reported that their operations resulted in deforestation of more than two million acres of rainforest, displacement of indigenous communities, and extensive water pollution that created a regional health crisis. Members of Indigenous tribes have unusually high rates of cancer, skin rashes and respiratory ailments.

• **Dumping of Toxic Wastes in Developing Countries** – "Between 1989 and 1994, it is estimated that the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries exported 2,611,677 metric tons of hazardous wastes to non-OECD countries."[15] The illicit movement and dumping of toxic and dangerous substances and wastes constitute a serious threat to the life and health of individuals, particularly in developing countries that do not have the technologies to process them. Although the Basel Convention prohibits the transhipment of many forms of toxic waste, "products such as pesticides and other chemicals banned or severely restricted by the United States, Western Europe and Japan because of their acute toxicity, environmental persistence or carcinogenic qualities are still regularly sent to the Third World."[16] The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Illicit Dumping of Toxic Wastes has been asked to examine racially motivated discrimination practices in relation to the illicit movement and dumping of toxic and dangerous products and wastes.[17]

leaking oil from Shell oilfields, Nigeria
Photo: Leigh Lewis, Greenpeace.

Why is this happening?

• **Racism** – First, a double standard exists as to what practices are acceptable in certain communities, villages or cities and not in others. Second, people of colour around the world pay a greater and dis-



US-Mexican border near El Paso. Photo: Peter Williams, WCC.

pro-
portionate
price for economic
development, resources
extraction and industrialism in terms of their health, quality of life and livelihood. Although corporate greed and the lack of corporate accountability explains a tremendous amount of what is described above, racism in the form of environmental racism, plays a significant role that must not be overlooked.

...a double standard exists as to what practices are acceptable in certain communities, villages or cities and not in others..., people of colour around the world pay a greater and disproportionate price for economic development, resources extraction and industrialism in terms of their health, quality of life and livelihood.

• **Transnational Power and the Mobility of Global Corporations** – Financial institutions and trade agreements have facilitated the movement of capital and goods across borders. Corporations have become more powerful than nation states and are not accountable to anyone except their shareholders. Their mobility has made it possible for them to seek the greatest profit, the least government regulations, and the best tax incentives, anywhere in the world. Workers are exposed to economic and environmental blackmail; they either accept low-paying, often non-unionised jobs with environmental health risks, or the jobs will move to another country.

• **Profits Before People** – Some have argued that resource wars will be the impetus for the major conflicts in the 21st Century.[18] Traditional land rights and sacred cultural sites are under-valued when it interferes with gaining access to resources and therefore profit. The impact that extraction and processing industries have on human health and quality of life doesn't matter. People are increasingly unwanted and unneeded for increased profit; they are becoming disposable.

• **Lower Environmental Standards Abroad** – More stringent environmental regulations in the United States have contributed to the downsizing of operations here and the expansion of activities abroad. Large oil companies are under-investing in and selling off their US refineries, while focusing their investment efforts on new overseas drilling opportunities where their return on capital is higher.

• **Lack of Power** – Minority groups in Nigeria, small rural African American communities in Louisiana, Indigenous Peoples around the world and others share something in common; they lack the political power, they lack information and vital global strategies to take on powerful multinational corporations and/or repressive state or national governments/regimes.

What can be done?

To fight against environmental degradation and repressive economic policies, people have heretofore relied on changing national governments, their policies and agencies. For the most part, people engaged in national networking and national resistance strategies. But as Karliner (1997) and others have noted that, "as the centres of political and economic power shift from the nation-state toward an international economic system increasingly dominated by transnational corporations, shifting also are the strategies, tactics and targets of movements working on social and environmental justice."[19] Richard Falk (1993) posits that a new paradigm, "globalisation from below", is needed during this historical period. Globalisation from below is based on a global civil society that seeks to extend ideas of moral, legal and environmental accountability to those now acting on behalf of the state, market and media. Others have noted the need for transborder alliances[20], a global civil society[21] and global social movements[22]. It is clear that global networking and global resistance are necessary strategies to solve the problems of environmental racism.

The United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and

Related Intolerance (WCR) in 2001 will examine contemporary manifestations of racism and strategies to achieve full and effective equality. This conference, and the preparatory processes that lead up to it, provide an excellent opportunity to highlight examples of environmental racism globally, develop global networks of organisations involved in environmental and economic justice advocacy, and begin developing strategies of mutual solidarity actions. The Regional PrepComs organised by the United Nations, and those being organised by the World Council of Churches, will enable people to make links on a regional level. The issue of environmental racism must be taken up at these regional PrepComs and its inclusion on the agenda of the World Conference must be stressed.

Environmental racism is just old wine in a new bottle. It is essential that this issue be addressed seriously at the World Conference in 2001, that both domestic and international remedies for victims of environmental racism be identified, and that the Programme of Action that will be agreed to by member states includes concrete measures to ensure environmental justice for all.

Dr Deborah Robinson was formerly a member of the Programme to Combat Racism team of the WCC. She is currently the Executive Director of International Possibilities Unlimited in Washington DC. She is also the co-chair of the International Committee of the Interim National Black Environmental and Economic Justice Coordinating Committee and is working to facilitate the participation of that body and other NGOs in the UN World Conference Against Racism.

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Racial Violence

By Mukami McCrum

The use of violence as a method of control and domination of those who are deemed to be inferior and powerless is practised in many cultures, societies and countries of the world. At the domestic level, it is used against women, children and other vulnerable members of the family. At the national and international level, poor people, asylum seekers, refugees, Black and minority ethnic, migrant and Indigenous Peoples are occasionally subjected to, or threatened with, violence by the state and the institutions that uphold and perpetuate violence in the name of peace, order and national security. Any form of violence is harmful to the victim and has wider implications for society as a whole.

Describing racism

Racism is a doctrine of hatred of people based on the belief that certain people are superior to others. It is often argued that, because in the animal kingdom human beings are classified as belonging to one race, the term racism is wrong because it assumes that the perpetrators and victims of racism belong to different races. However throughout history, groups of people who share certain characteristics have been subjected to inhuman, unjust and cruel treatment because of their difference from the dominant group. The difference has been described as racial and therefore it is appropriate to define violence which is perpetrated on grounds of colour, ethnicity and nationality as racial violence.

Racial violence differs from other forms of violence in that the root causes are to do with assumption of superiority and dislike of other people who are deemed to be inferior because of their identity, ethnic origin, nationality, national origins or descent; and because of their appearance and physical characteristics such as colour, language and dress. These are natural and normal attributes, and any attack on them is an attack of the very core of one's essence as a human being and as a member of the human race. Racial violence manifests itself in many ways. In its mildest form, it can be pushing, spitting, name-calling, teasing, or practical jokes. In more serious cases it involves physical assault, arson, stabbing, rape, murder, attempted murder, massacres and genocide.

There is no continent which is free of racial violence. Racial violence has been the trade-mark of racism throughout history.

A global phenomenon

There is no continent which is free of racial violence. Racial violence has been the trade-mark of racism throughout history. In the Americas and Caribbean, the Colombian legacy of dispossession, massacres, violence and near annihilation of the native peoples, and the brutal slave trade have left lasting effects on marginalised communities of that area. The slave trade, imperialism and colonialism, and more recently apartheid, were systematic and legalised forms of racism which used brutal force and violence against Africans, Asians and Indigenous Peoples, including Dalits, Gypsies and travelling people. Violence against these people has excluded them from social, political, cultural, economic and educational benefits because of their colour, caste, descent. In India, the so called "pollution line" still divides Dalits from other castes in spite the abolition of the practice of untouchability fifty years ago. Today, beatings, rape and murder of Dalits still happen.

Historical perspective

The history of the struggles against slavery, colonialism and imperialism reveals atrocities and massacres of people who in most cases were poorly armed and who just wanted their freedom. The vicious methods used to destroy the resistance against the Portuguese in Brazil, the Mau Mau struggle in Kenya, the rape of Dalit women in India and the massacre of

the Indigenous Peoples in the Caribbean and the Americas are just a few examples. South Africa was a perfect example of legalised racism. Years of state violence against Africans, Indians and "Coloureds" in South Africa kept apartheid alive, and it has left a legacy of psychological and racial violence. A few years ago, as a member of a WCC solidarity team visit to the Aboriginal people of Australia, I was exposed to stories and images, that still haunt me today, about the history and experiences of the Aboriginal people since the arrival of Europeans in Australia. In the eighteenth century, while the anthropologists and ethnographers studied the life-styles of the Aboriginal people, the "terra nullius" (empty land) policy and legal system refused to classify them as human beings. This did not officially change until 1967. The British Crown had applied a systematic colonisation of the country which included massacre, rape and dispossession of Aboriginal people with long-lasting effects of poverty, disease, exclusion and violence which are visible today.

While physical violence is easier to recognise, other forms of violence are equally damaging. There is a growing body of evidence that persistent low-level harassment affects the health and wellbeing of people subjected to it

Effects of racial violence

While physical violence is easier to recognise, other forms of violence are equally damaging. There is a growing body of evidence that persistent low-level harassment affects the health and wellbeing of people subjected to it. It leaves physical and psychological scars which are passed on from person to person in the community and remembered by generations to come. Living in fear because one belongs to a race or a group of people who are subjected to violence and constant harassment is a major cause of mental health and low self esteem. Those who are racially harassed often adopt an identity with the negative images and labels they are given. Resistance sometimes leads to further more dangerous harassment and discrimination. The notion of being "created in the image of God" is meaningless when the image one sees reflected in the "mirror called society" is that of an inferior, rejected and abused woman, man or child.

From murder to massacre and genocide

The horror of racially motivated murders is too painful to comprehend. It leaves a long-lasting negative impression on the minds of the victims family, community and society as a whole. It is a signal and warning which Christians, and people who care about humanity, should never ignore. It is a warning of the consequences of racial and ethnic hatred which, if unchecked, can lead to the indiscriminate slaughter of men, women and children by other human beings justified by hatred, enmity and dislike of the other. The genocides in Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo are recent reminders of the evil that can be generated by political systems. History is littered with similar examples, and we must never forget the systematic violence meted out to slaves, Indigenous Peoples and others during the slave trade, colonialism and imperialism.

Response to racial violence

The state response to racial violence indicates the way society, the institutions and the political systems behave towards those who are perceived to be different. In many countries, people have been murdered because of their ethnic origin, nationality or their colour. In Britain the list stretches to over a hundred Black people murdered over the last ten years. The most well known case is that of Stephen Lawrence, stabbed to death on 22 April 1993 as he waited for a bus in London. The attack was unprovoked and the only reason for his murder was that he was Black. His death was tragic, but the failure of the justice system to catch and prosecute those responsible added to the grief and injury felt by his family, the Black community and anti-racism activists everywhere. The enquiry which ensued, following his parent's persistent campaign in pursuit of truth and justice, revealed entrenched institutional racism within the police force which had led to inexcusable errors in the caring for Stephen as he lay dying. There is no doubt that racism played a crucial role, not just in the stabbing but in the subsequent response made by the police. Stephen's life was meaningless not only to his killers but to the system in the country he called home.

The state responds to resistance against racism with ever-increasing sophistication, including legal measures and advanced military force. The increase of extremist political parties who distribute materials which incite racial hatred, and the fact that government condemnation of racism, in most cases, amounts to meaningless platitudes, has meant that perpetrators of racial violence feel empowered and encouraged to continue their racist practices. States sanction racial violence by legal documents, rules and procedures which portray certain groups of people as inferior, as criminals or scroungers.

Across Europe, and no doubt in other parts of the world, anti-racism campaigners and organisations have documented and monitored a large increase in racial incidents and violence. In recent years there has been an unprecedented increase in the numbers of internally displaced people, refugees and migrant workers. At the same time, powerful countries have introduced stringent control measures to keep those displaced people out. There is an undeniable body of evidence of the role of the state in perpetuating racism and racial violence. The Migrant Newsheet (published by the Migration Policy Group, Brussels) produces a monthly digest of the experiences of refugees and ethnic minorities in Europe. In March 2000, it reported that an Austrian high-ranking police officer, who was accused of suggesting that Africans should be beaten before asking them any questions, had his case dropped by the public prosecutor.

The role of religion

The role that major religions played in causing and perpetuating racism, and the associated violence that went with it, must be acknowledged and the sin of racism must be confessed as part of the healing process. The churches' recent record of standing with the oppressed is notable. It is essential that the church continues to speak out against oppression and support those who resist violence. At the dawn of the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence, as churches draw up their action plans, the issue of racial violence must be included from the start. For many people it is easy to recognise and name violence associated with wars, ethnic cleansing, and state aggression against its own citizens. However we must understand and make links between the root causes of violence against individuals and other forms of violence. The fear, hatred, dislike and the negative attitude towards people because of their ethnicity, colour, cast, religion, class or gender, when nurtured and fuelled by those who have the advantage of possessing economic, military or political power, can be turned into the ugly and obscene annihilation of people and a total disregard of their humanity.

The church can, and must, nurture a culture of non-violence and restore through a healing process a world where we can live in peace and without fear. To do this, the church must be bold and confident in leading the way to a better common understanding and respect for human rights of all people. •

Mukami McCrum is the Moderator of the WCC Women's Advisory Group and was previously a member of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission. McCrum was born and raised in Kenya where she worked as a teacher before moving to Scotland where she raised her family and studied at the University of Edinburgh and at Moray House College of Education.

She is a sociologist and has previously worked as a community worker and as a project coordinator. She was a founder member of Shakti Women's Aid, a project for Black women against violence. She is a member of the Board of Akina mama wa Afrika a development NGO for African women in Europe and Africa. She plays an active role in the SISTERS network of the JPC team. She has been a member of government race forums in UK and Scotland and is currently employed as the Director of Central Scotland Race Equality Council in UK.

Meeting at the end of the most violent century ever in human history and at the threshold of a new century, the VIIIth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare, declared 2001 – 2010 as the "***Decade to Overcome Violence***". It is an urgent call to churches and ecumenical organisations to work together for peace, justice and reconciliation in a world overwhelmed by a culture of violence. The Decade is to be launched in Berlin on February 4, 2001 during a meeting of the WCC Central Committee.

The emphasis of the Decade is on "overcoming". An honest way to overcome violence is to deal with its causes. These are often structural and cultural in nature, affecting social, political and economic relationships. As a result, certain categories of people are always the victims of various forms of violence.

Racism is one such cause of violence all over the world today. It is domination based on discrimination and oppression of the powerless, akin to other dominations such as patriarchy, caste and xenophobia. It is hoped that the Decade will address these shameful traits of our modern generation within and outside the churches.

For more information on the Decade write to "WCC/Decade to Ovecome Violence", P.O.Box 2100, 1211 Geneva, 2, Switzerland. *Email:* dov@wcc-coe.org; *or go to the WCC* webpage: "http://wcc-coe.org"

Interview with Manchala Deenabandhu

ON THE SUBJECT OF CASTEISM

ECHOES: *One does not hear the word "racism" in India. Of course you hear of casteism. Tell me about it.*

Deenabandhu: There is racism in India although not the way it is experienced elsewhere in the world. Casteism is the synonym for racism in India. Caste is a system of hierarchy by which people are put into rigid social categories. These categories are not based on physical features but on the religious ideology of Brahminical Hinduism (Hindutva) which holds that people are born with certain qualities (varnas) and therefore some are born superior and others inferior. Thus it advocates that one's social status is determined by birth and that one cannot simply get out of it. Caste, therefore, is a culture that ensures powers and privileges to the dominant through the subjugation and exploitation of the lower castes.

This pervasive culture has a decisive hold on Indian social behaviour and relationships. Community is always conceived as caste community, resulting in social distance and the discrimination and subjugation of the lower castes in all spheres of life. The prevalence of the practice of untouchability even today in the Indian villages, despite several laws restricting it, makes casteism more dehumanising than racism. The Dalits (Untouchables) live outside the village, are not allowed entry into temples, are served food and beverages in separate cups at teashops, and even have separate burial grounds. They are told that they are not only inferior but despicable and untouchable. This is the most inhuman expression of the Indian society's racism, called casteism.

E: *We talk about racism being a combination power and privilege. Does that apply to casteism?*

D: Absolutely. Because of this deep-rooted religio-cultural legitimisation, the dominant caste communities have monopolised power, privileges and assets to themselves, and are able to ensure loyalty and obedience from the lower castes. Even today, a large number of the victims of caste system believe that it is divinely ordained that they should thus live and be treated. The practice of caste by its victims has been its strength.

E: *Would you say that racism and casteism are the same?*

D: Yes. These two cultures of domination and exclusion penalise people for no fault of their own and deny them a dignified human identity. But there are some differences. As I said earlier, caste is based on a religio-cultural ideology, and that makes the task of combatting caste and dealing with caste discrimination very difficult. Secondly, in situations where racism is practised, you are able to identify the victim straight away. By making certain political decisions, you can also ensure relative justice to the victims. But caste has a different operating principle. The Indian government swears

Rev. Manchala Deenabandhu Photo: Chris Black, WCC.

Kusumpur is one of the many slums which surround Delhi. 40'000 people live here most of them Dalits and Indigenous. Photo: Peter Williams, WCC.

by an egalitarian constitution that prohibits any form of discrimination in public life. But the fact is that it is everywhere. Caste loyalties play a decisive role in all social, political and economic formations, decisions and dynamics.

E: *Racism can be described as the assumptions people make about other people that they put into practice because they have the power to do so. They act on those assumptions, using their power to discriminate. It seems to me that in casteism there are no assumptions but definite demarcations.*

D: There are assumptions. But these are used as instruments of exclusion to justify and perpetuate the hegemony of those who have managed to grab positions of power and privilege. The upper castes' behaviour is glorified and the lower castes' limitations are derided. One's social behaviour, skills, abilities, etc. are seen along caste lines. These assumptions have dehumanised and continue to dehumanise the Dalits. They suffer multiple forms of disabilities, and the prominent among these is the assumption that their touch is polluting, that they are not capable of learning, not worthy enough to think and decide, but are made only for hard physical labour and for the service of others. Even if many of them do not do any polluting jobs any longer, their polluted identity remains. Is this not a form of racism?

E: *Racism exists in other parts of Asia. In India it is casteism. It is said that racism is like a poison in a society, and that no society can live with that poison. Is that true for casteism?*

D: Yes. But Indian society has lived with this poison for nearly 3500 years and continues to do so. However, I hasten to assert that it has been a poison for millions of people who have been its victims, who have been denied the right to live as human beings. Furthermore, since caste has such a pervasive hold on every sphere of life including our political life, it has virtually prevented the emergence of any just, progressive and inclusive ideological rallying points to help us march into the future as one strong nation. Caste has become a tool of grabbing and wielding power. Each caste group tries to assert its prominence and hegemony over the rest. Some fields of public life are monopolised by certain caste communities. It is certainly a kind of poison that divides people, destroys creativity and makes people insensitive to the dehumanisation it causes.

E: *What does it mean to be a Dalit in the current political situation in India, with the rise of Hindutva and Hindu nationalism?*

D: Firstly, as I said earlier, the current political situation is marked by the fragmentation of political power. Narrow ideologies, local issues and local parties dominate the national political scene. These narrow political interests lack ideological bases capable of guiding the life and future course of a nation as large and diverse as India. These local powers exploit caste, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and other, sentiments to consolidate their hold over the masses. The Dalits gain nothing from these powers except unfulfilled promises and continued bondage.

Secondly, the protagonists of Hindutva are the wealthy upper castes who have monopolised the country's business and industry and, using the pretext of India's economic growth, are striving hard to see that their interests are met in the market world. This version of cultural nationalism, as preached and practised by those who have benefitted from the caste system, can only be destructive to the majority of Indians – nearly four fifth of the population. And the Dalits are its worst victims.

Community educators present the suffering of the Dalits through a drama in Kanglvakam, a Dalit village about 45 km south of Chennai/Madras. Photo: Peter Williams, WCC.

Thirdly, during the past two decades there has been a significant trend of growing awareness and solidarity among the marginalised sections of the Indian society. The rural and urban poor – who are mostly the Dalits, tribals, backward castes, women, agricultural labourers – are getting organised and are threatening to shake the unjust foundations on which Indian society stands. Hindutva forces want to deal with this growing solidarity among the oppressed by sowing seeds of hatred along communal lines, and thus ensure their continued hold over the politics and economy of the country. The recent atrocities against Christians in Gujarat and Orissa illustrate this point. These hitherto oppressed and exploited tribal communities, with the moral strength and dignity their new faith has given them, began to raise their voices against unjust wages and unfair treatment. So right-wing political leaders want a debate on conversions, not on the evil practice of caste. They hope thereby to arouse Hindu sentiments and cover up some of the gross injustices.

E: *Do you think the caste system will be overthrown?*

D: As a Dalit and as a part of the Dalit movement, I am committed to the vision of a casteless Indian society. But it has always been and is a very arduous struggle. Caste is changing its manifestations and dynamics. Today it has become a political weapon. Caste identities are an important feature in the political games. Political adjustments, alignments and compromises take place along caste lines. Within this ethos, the Dalits are also getting organised politically, but without a well-marked ideological focus. Unfortunately, instead of fighting caste by submerging their given caste identities, some Dalits have begun to fight with each other in some places. So, it seems to me that caste will be with us for some time.

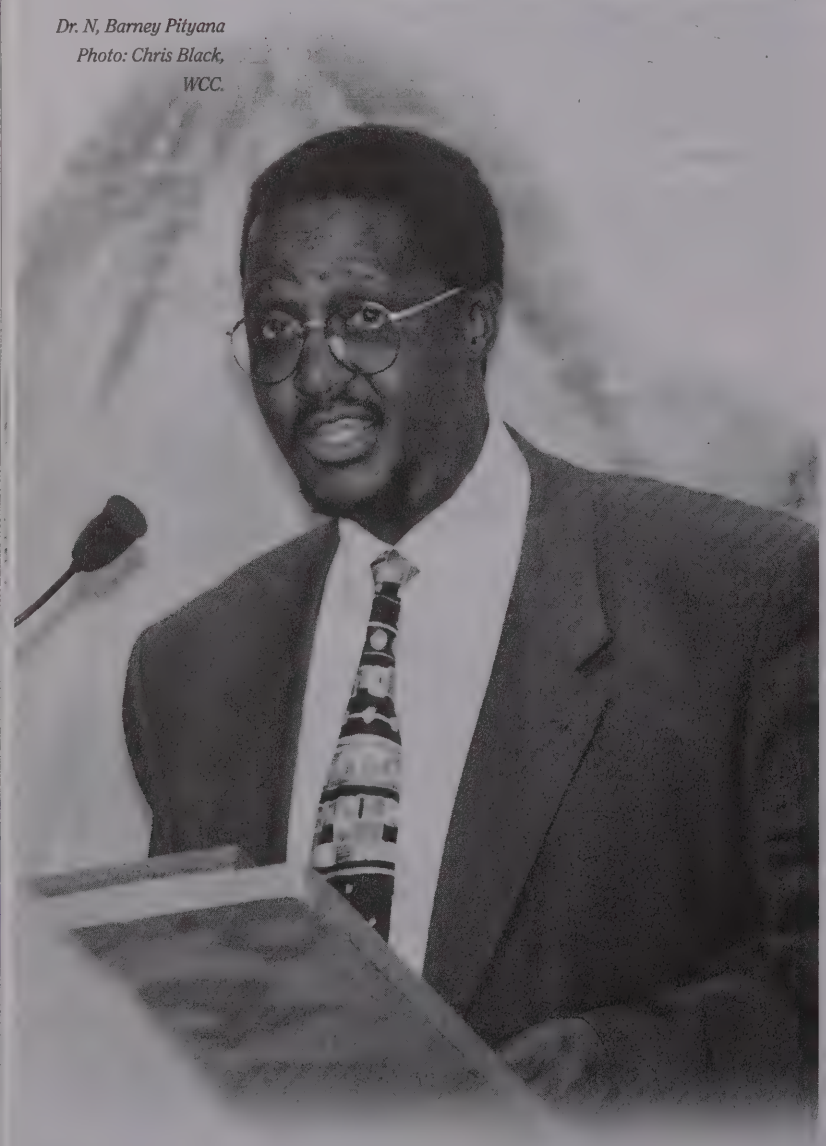
The silver lining is that Dalits and Bahujans (backward castes) are struggling hard to overcome these internal divisions and to fight together to overthrow the shameful practice of caste. These movements of the despised are the only hope for a united and progressive India. What is needed is a coordinated effort to develop a strong and pragmatic Dalit ideology that would inspire the victims of caste to shed their given identities and to work together for a society free of discrimination and oppression.

Manchala Deenabandhu is presently working in the Justice, Peace and Creation team of the WCC as executive secretary for Peace concerns. He comes from Andhra Pradesh, India, and is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in India. In 1994 he became assistant professor in the Department of Dalit Theology in Gurukul, Madras. He has written several books and published many articles and papers

Another scene from Kusumpur Photo: Peter Williams, WCC.

REDEFINING UNDER-STANDINGS OF RACISM

By N. Barney Pityana



Dr. N, Barney Pityana Photo: Chris Black, WCC.

At the beginning of this century, African American intellectual and social activist W.E.B. du Bois proclaimed that the 20th Century would face as its greatest challenge the problem of the colour-line. In fact, du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk* did not get into any definition of Black or race. That became the preoccupation of scholars in the decades that followed. What is remarkable, though, is the extent to which du Bois' words proved accurate. It is worth recalling the context. Slavery had been abolished some sixty years before. At Berlin in the 1880s the imperial and colonial powers divided Africa into a patchwork of colonial colours. Progress for the freed slaves was slow. They continued to suffer untold discrimination, and the promise of emancipation was not enjoyed by all. The end of slavery meant the growth of colonies. It was now no longer necessary to transport the human cargo across oceans. Instead, Black peoples all over the world were enslaved in their own lands. They no longer owned the lands that belonged to their forefathers. The wealth of their lands was only for the benefit of the imperial masters. Their nation's treasure was transported to lands far away. Du Bois' crystal-gazing was not too far-fetched. It was hardly a prophecy.

In the intervening period, we have had two world wars, both of which had the problem of the race-line very much at the centre. The first war ended with even more sophisticated methods of dividing the spoils. The second in its barbarity caused such outrage that there was a determination to bring all injustice and racial discrimination to an end. Twice during this century, racism has divided and torn nations apart, brought about conflict and untold human misery. In addition, a collective programme was adopted which committed all nations to common standards.

Instead of the sophisticated trust territories of the previous war, 1945 accelerated the independence of colonial states and began the roll-back of empires.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) states this unequivocally:

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.

The declaration was perhaps the first effort at setting universal, international standards of achievement for all peoples and all nations and for all time. The other declarations – from Britain, France and the United States of America – were never designed consciously to have international application.

The UDHR's first article declares boldly that:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

It is not without significance that the UDHR starts as it does. The world as it was then known was torn apart by racial bigotry. Slavery, after all, was racism par excellence and what followed it was the continued practice of racial discrimination, albeit by another name. The UDHR simply had to address the perennial problem of relations between peoples, within, without and between states. Du Bois, who continued to champion his vision of pan-Africanism until his death in Ghana in 1963, would have felt a resonance with the Declaration.

But we have moved some way since then. Not only has the standard-setting process, begun in Paris in 1948, continued in leaps and bounds, but we are today faced with the project of refining, interpreting and implementing these standards and norms. The international community went on to adopt principles of humanitarian law building on the 1948 conventions. Later two covenants – the Civil and Political Rights, and the Economic Social and Cultural Rights, 1966 covenants – were enacted. The conventions that followed, beginning with the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, sought to establish an internationally applicable and obligatory regime of rights which could be enjoyed by all people everywhere. In 1963 the UN General Assembly adopted the landmark Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Declaration states that racial discrimination is not only a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, but goes on to say that it is "an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations among nations and as a fact capable of disturbing the peace and security among peoples". The

Mitrovica, Kosovo, where ethnic cleaning has been brought into the world's vocabulary. Photo: Mikkel Östergaard, WCC.

Displaced Roma children in North Mitrovica. Photo: Peter Williams, WCC.

International Convention came into force in 1969. It is worth remembering that international action against racism was influenced by the horror felt by the world community at the Sharpeville Massacre – it was a case of Nazism revived. And so, not only was the Declaration and the Convention adopted, but 21 March, the day of the Sharpeville shootings, became the International Day for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Fifty-one years after the Universal Declaration was adopted and proclaimed and 30 years after the Convention came into force, Ms Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has announced in Geneva that a World Conference Against Racism, Xenophobia and other Forms of Intolerance will be held in South Africa, possibly in July/August 2001. Why is it necessary to hold this major international event? Not only have there been two previous world conferences, but there have also been two UN Decades to Combat Racism and we are into the third such decade. There has also been the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna 1993. That conference urged all governments "to take immediate measures and to develop strong policies to prevent and combat all forms and manifestations of racism, xenophobia or related intolerance..." Today, wars are still being fought across racial divides. How else does one explain the conflagration in the former Yugoslavia, where ethnic cleansing has been brought into the world's vocabulary? How else does one understand Kosovo and even Chechnya?

Nearer home, how does one explain the wars in Congo, the genocide in Rwanda, the conflict in Burundi, the Sudan and elsewhere in Africa? What about the atrocities in Sierra Leone, where a population has been amputated and maimed in pursuit of race/ethnic goals, and where a false peace has been cobbled together? We are discovering just how painfully true the statements of the Universal Declaration and the Declaration on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination were. Clearly strategies for the removal of racism have not borne fruit. Racism continues to be tolerated in too many countries of the world and international instruments and propaganda have not brought an end to its practice and influence. The examples here are probably evidence of the worst forms, and outcomes, of human rights violations, but there are others more subtle and more intractable that the world has to confront. There is a need for a diagnosis as to why, with so much of the world's attention focused on racism for so long, we are still confronted with this scourge? At the end of du Bois' century we have not succeeded in eliminating racism from the map of the world.

Racism is embedded in language and perceptions; it is brought into being by power, and its effect is to exclude others. Often, it is a collective denial of the humanity of the other.

Neither the Declaration nor the Convention specifically mentions racism as such. What the Declaration does is to couch the definition of racial discrimination in the widest possible terms. Some may argue that this is so wide that it becomes a catch-all and takes away the particularity of racism. By so doing it allows much to come under the rubric of racial discrimination. But we now face the task of having to refine understandings of racism as distinct from mere racial discrimination. Racism is much more vicious, marked by violence and violations of the right to dignity. Racism is not merely individual attitudes about others, or mere separation on the basis of visible characteristics, or prejudice and social practices. Racism is embedded in language and perceptions; it is brought into being by power, and its effect is to exclude others. Often, it is a collective denial of the humanity of the other. Once that denial of humanity has been established, it then opens the way to treating persons as less than human. It is an ideology that justifies the treatment of others as less than human. Other forms of racism have also become

apparent, like xenophobia, as well as racism based on ethnic difference. All must be confronted with like passion and vigour.

It is vital that racism is named as such, and revealed for what it is. The one who is a victim of it best understands racism. It therefore behoves those who are at the receiving end to name it.

Theo van Boven, a member of the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, reports that in a recent survey on racial attitudes, some sixteen states denied that racism existed in their countries at all. The reality, however, is that every country in the world these days experiences the reality of racism and racial attitudes. Forms of denial range from denial of the concept, as having no scientific validity (as in classical Marxist-Leninism) as a false doctrine, therefore, (analogous to the Hegelian false consciousness), to a denial that any given set of circumstances constitutes racism. This is often done by explaining situations away in a race-neutral fashion, attributing them to "merit" or to a "legitimate pursuit of excellence", or by accusing the complainant of reverse, or inverted, racism. In almost all circumstances, racists are defensive and counter-label their accusers.

Many of these denials have become part of the vocabulary of apologetics in the new South Africa. The Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development has tabled draft legislation in parliament in the form of the Promotion of Equality and the Prohibition of Unfair Discrimination Bill, 1999. The bill seeks, among others, to proscribe racism and racial discrimination, and to prohibit the dissemination of all ideas which promote and propagate racial superiority. The objective is to establish substantive equality. There are many who argue that such legislation would be in contravention of the Constitution, especially where freedom of speech is concerned. Others believe that the law will proscribe affirmative action. Almost everybody professes a commitment to equality, but believes that normal business and trade policies and practices will fall foul of the law and thus cause the flight of capital and investments. The law has invariably been described by the media as "draconian". We have found that one way of frightening off investors, or undermining any serious action against racism in this country is both to proclaim revulsion for racism and racial hatred and, at the same time, resist all efforts at doing something meaningful about it. The menu that is being offered us is a do-nothing menu.

Meanwhile racial violence is rife in South Africa. Ask any farm labourer. Too many young professionals are being refused rented housing in Johannesburg. Banks and lending agencies are unashamed of redlining. This is being justified as a necessary and legitimate management of risk. Many of our people have no recourse against racism. Can one explain why, in this day and age, it makes sense for our national teams to be exclusively White when British and French teams sport more Black players than we do? What about racial profiling? Police and security firms, including debt collectors, indulge in racial profiling whereby the officer has a "hunch" that a Black person is more likely to be a criminal, a burglar or a hijacker. He acts merely on instinct. There have been many instances where Black South Africans have been thrown into jail because they are considered so dark that they could only be illegal immigrants. The equation of blackness with corruption, inefficiency and other forms of criminal conduct have become so commonplace that we are in danger of accepting it as fact as a matter of course.

The equation of blackness with corruption, inefficiency and other forms of criminal conduct have become so commonplace that we are in danger of accepting it as fact as a matter of course.

All governments are part of the international community. No country will be able to exercise authority in world affairs if it is unwilling to take its international obligations seriously, and to be a force for good at home and abroad. In the lead-up to the UN World Conference on Racism in 2001, all countries should dialogue and debate about how to construct a non-racial society; and take measures to eliminate and combat all forms of racism. In order to do that, the culture of denial or explaining the reality away must stop. •

Dr Nyameko Barney Pityana was Director of the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism, based in Geneva, from 1988 to1992. He returned to South Africa in 1993 to take up appointment as Senior Research Officer at the Research Institute for Christianity in South Africa at the University of Cape Town. While at UCT, he undertook research in Religious Studies and was awarded the PhD in Religious Studies in 1995. He was admitted an Attorney of the High Court in February 1996. He was appointed a member of the Human Rights Commission in 1995 and elected Chairperson at the inaugural meeting of the Commission on 2 October 1995. He was elected to the African Commission on Human & Peoples' Rights in 1997. He holds honorary degrees in divinity from Trinity College, Hartford, USA (1996) and another in law from the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina (1999).

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THEOLOGICAL DECONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM

By Maria-Cristina Ventura

Introduction

Theological deconstruction leading to reconstruction is essential for an understanding of theology in the struggle against racism. The exercise of deconstructing involves questioning and confronting theology, which has traditionally been defined, in terms of one culture, as reflection on God, who is not only masculine but also hierarchical and absolute. In this way, the meaning of the divine in the history of other cultures has been destroyed and marginalised. "Deconstructing" is therefore to be understood in the sense of breaking down the elements of traditional theological thinking in order to analyse them, destabilise them and disqualify them from speaking for all people and all cultures. But deconstructing or breaking down offers an opportunity for rebuilding, working out new models that can subvert the racist dynamic present in traditional theology and the culture to which it belongs, so that hierarchies cease to exist.

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The reasons why I see a need for theological deconstruction and reconstruction in the struggle against racism stem first of all from my own identity as a Black, Caribbean woman, and secondly from my experience of theological work in different Christian communities. In this situation I see and feel the domination of one race over others, which has placed Black people in a situation of marginalisation, discrimination and exclusion, but has also sparked struggle and resistance.

Thinking about theological deconstruction and reconstruction also causes me to think about the social reality which makes me feel the need for such an exercise. I find that we are living in an increasingly disorganised world, a world of many cultures that is nevertheless becoming ever more globalised. This process of globalisation corresponds to a world culture that sets itself above all the other cultures. It is a culture which does not like other cultures, though other cultures like it.

In the societies of Latin America and the Caribbean we observe a growing need and quest for the divine, the desire for different world where the meaning of life is recovered. There is a sense of need for religious experiences which can give the strength to find solutions to the concrete problems of everyday life. Yet the divine is thought of in the categories of a patriarchal mentality.[1] This way of thinking has to do with a hierarchical world where a person counts or is valued in terms of economic class, religion, education, ethnic group, race, sex, gender, appearance.

These elements plus discrimination cause racism. We may say, therefore, that we live in a *kyriarchal* world[2] (i.e. dominated by elite-male relations of ruling) which constructs hierarchy not only in the personal sphere but also in its structures; it is racist, classist, sexist, etc. and the violence of the construction is reflected in language, and in physical or psychological forms.

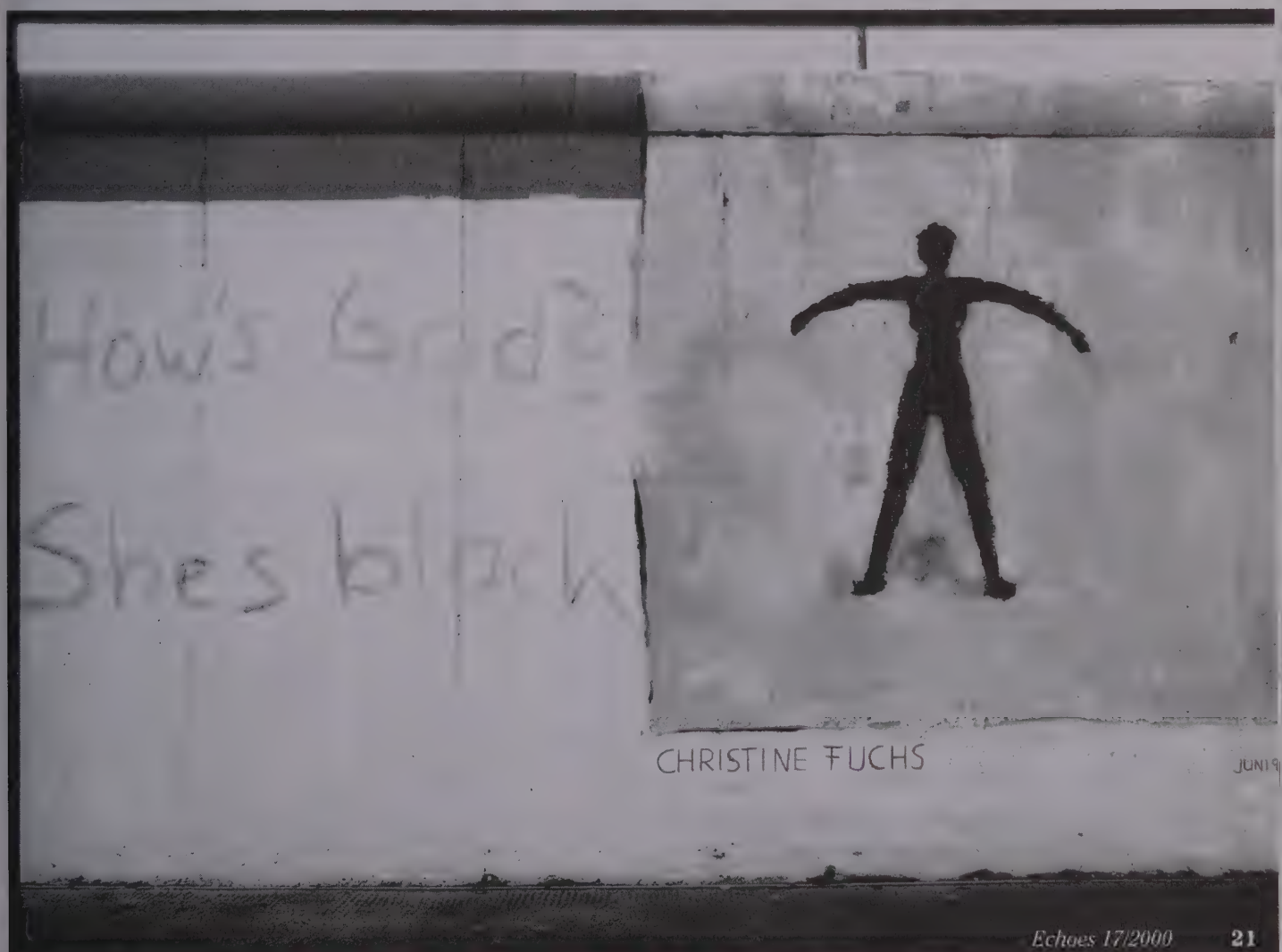
We are talking about a personal and structural construction which is imposed as an epistemological model for thinking about the world. It is a form of knowledge limited to a certain perspective on reality as seen by a specific group of people [3] (generally, male and white), so that we may say that this construction is not only androcentric but also racist. However, it is impossible to understand a culture without understanding the religion of that culture, as these are inter-related. A religion is created in a culture and it carries the ideology of that culture. It acts not only as an expression of that culture but above all as its divine validation. This means that the way in which the divine is thought of in a hierarchical society will also be hierarchical.[4] This being so, the model of reasoning used in thinking about the world is one based on hegemony and domination, and it is in terms of such reasoning that we look at Christian theology – a theology which reveals itself as racist and, above all, hegemonic in its practices.

What we mean when we speak of deconstructing is not a method or a doctrine, but an event which may in principle be described as a reading, a writing or practical thinking which destabilises the system of binary opposites on which western thinking is founded.

The need for deconstructing

Speaking about theology in the struggle against racism immediately leads us to say that theology, as we know it from our own experience of oppression as Black people, is not exempt from racist practices. We live in a world sustained by a strongly dualistic type of theology. This thinking is inherited from Greek thinking which saw itself as superior to all other

Photo: Wolf Kutnahorsky, WCC



forms of thinking. It may be described schematically as follows:

reason /emotion, spirit/body, transcendent/immanent, heaven/earth, good/evil, culture/nature, man/woman, black/white, clean /unclean, moral/immoral.

The racism practised against Black people is based on this thinking. Blackness is associated with all that is corporal, unclean... Following this logic Blacks, Indigenous People, women are not invested with holiness. This form of thinking represents the dominant, hegemonic culture – the image of God the Creator of all things is present in it alone. According to this type of theology there exists an essence of things, that which makes something what it is and not something else, and gives it its specificity.[5]

It is this type of thinking which urgently calls for deconstruction, an exercise frequently carried out by feminist theologians[6]. What we mean when we speak of deconstructing is not a method or a doctrine, but an event which may in principle be described as a reading, a writing or practical thinking which destabilises the system of binary opposites on which western thinking is founded.[7] Deconstruction reveals the inter-dependence of apparently opposed elements and reveals them as unstable and constantly deceptive. The practice of deconstruction subverts hierarchy and the logic of thinking which constantly repeats abstract constructions as real.

Thus, the construction which presents Black people as inferior, of low intelligence and not bearers of holiness... is revealed as false, a construction used to maintain the hegemony of one culture – White, western culture. However, it is not enough for theological action simply to be conscious of the struggles and demands of oppressed groups. It must first be able to make a critical assessment of the historical function of that theology in the lives of those groups. It is important to stress that the theology that has to be deconstructed, and which is traditionally practised in many of our churches, is traditional White theology. It is a racist and oppressive theology.

Proposal for theological reconstruction

The practice of deconstruction enables us, amongst other things, to unmask hegemonic theology. This theology reread the history of salvation in the light of Plato's philosophy and hence in the light of world of ideas. This theology thus affirms the existence of God beyond the physical world. Besides being a (male) God, he is perfect spirit. And as this idea of God is constructed, as we have seen, on the basis of a dualistic, hegemonic rationality which establishes hierarchy, God is conceived to be not only male, but also White.

The practice of theological reconstruction in efforts to combat racism confronts us from the start with an intrusive proposal, which has to do with common sense and everyday life. It comes from the periphery, or, as William R. Jones points out, reflecting on Black theology, "Black theology is by definition confirmed in conscious and fundamental opposition to White theology"[8]. In other words, counter-models spring up within the dominant model of rationality, representing the men and women whose aspirations are left unsatisfied. A theological reconstruction thus comes closer to recognising the provisional and multiple nature of knowledge, which is always particular, local, personal.

In short, a theological reconstruction constitutes a challenge to traditional theology by insisting that thinking about the divine can be conducted from the standpoint of those who are voiceless and marginalised, and not from that of the "winners of history".

A theological reconstruction is indebted to the epistemological explanation in traditional theology, but this prompts the construction of new theological models which propose new ways of conceiving the world and new ways of thinking about human beings and divinities. We may mention, amongst others, liberation theology, critical feminist theology, Black theology, Indigenous theologies, all of which announce a new way of thinking about the world. These theologies appear as new paradigms because they have emerged as criticism of the hegemonic rationality inside and outside the religious domain. They show us that it is not possible to think neutrally in theology because religion is a mould of custom. In short, a theological reconstruction constitutes a challenge to traditional theology by insisting that thinking about the divine can be conducted from the standpoint of those who are voiceless and marginalised, and not from that of the "winners of history".

Black men and women, with their experience, are the principal subjects of this new theology, which is a theology done out of the Black peoples' experience of suffering, struggle and resistance. The presence of Black people as subjects doing this theology, as well as a providing a new epistemology, shows that they no longer fit into the patterns of traditional theology and also that they are uncomfortable with simply being disguised as "the poor". They want to talk about their religious experience in terms of their own racial, ethnic, sexual and gender identities. They want to talk about their experience of the divine from their own places of hardship but also their spaces of joy and gladness. It is a new theology which does not have the same concepts of scripture, God, Christology, ec-

clesiology, the human being. So this reconstruction invites us to new ways of looking at things, new feelings and new ways of living.

A different way of looking at God

In the experience of many Black people the word "God" is not something static. The image of God is different for each person. This is so because the image of the divine often coincides with images from within a person, and traditional theology imposes images from without. Talking about God is something cultural and cannot be hegemonic. We discover the sacred in talking about experiences of life. So we can talk about God as a woman, as Black, Indigenous, a lamb, a hen, love, friend, wind, anger...[9] in other words, God can be male or female; God is not encompassed in one sex, far less one culture. In short, God has as many names as we have hopes and longings!

A new experience of human being

The concept of the human being in this new theology is not that of a completed being. It is more than Descartes' static concept of "I think, therefore I am". Therefore, instead of speaking of "human being" it speaks of "human identity", which explains why a person can be identified in the different facets of victim, accomplice or resistance. So the identity of Black persons is not only what others may say of them; they are no longer invisible, or visible only in predefined terms, and they can relate to other bodies in a non-kyriarchal way, as brothers and sisters.

Christ as a decentralised figure

Christology too has to be understood differently. We cannot deconstruct Christ biologically, but we can deconstruct the hero figure.[10] We have to realise that Jesus was a man from a particular culture. Consequently he cannot be placed above other cultures. As Black, Indigenous women we can look at him together with other persons from our cultures who have also borne witness in defending the lives of men and women who are disempowered. We do not want to continue making Christ the sole example of a divine person.

A new way of understanding the Bible

In this sense, too, the Bible has to be recognised not as an archetype but as a historical prototype, which enables women, Blacks and Indigenous people to see the text in connection with their own experiences and historical struggles for liberation. It has to be recognised that the Bible has been used to delay the emancipation of slaves and women, as well as to justify their emancipation. This being so, a critical feminist interpretation will help to overcome any attempts to identify our experiences with biblical texts or traditions and enable us to understand them as historical experiences in their own contexts and to discover new meanings for present realities.[11]

A reconstruction that leads us to different experiences of how to live and celebrate the faith

There is no doubt that the experience of theological reconstruction prompts constant assessment of the spaces of reference for living out the faith. The new subjects carrying out the reconstruction – women, Black and Indigenous men and women – feel the need for the traditional structures and spaces to be transformed. It must be said that many Christian churches view Black peoples' way of thinking about God and celebrating life as demonic. A break in the discourse and mentality of these churches is essential, a break that will allow the true *ecclesia*[12] to emerge, where different subjects can feel at home.

So it is important to recover and arrange spaces for spontaneous gatherings, to fill them with symbols and objects that have been banned until now in the official places. In these new spaces we will be able not only to recreate life through stories, memories and dreams, but also with music and dancing, songs and stories which accompany our dreams. Sacred spaces! •

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Notes:

1. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza. "But She Said" - Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation. Boston, Beacon Press, 1992, p. 105.

2. Ibid. P. 8

3 See Ivone Gebara. Teologia eco feminista – Ensaio para repensar o conhecimento e a religião. Sao Paulo, Olho da Agua, 1997, p.30

4. ---that which materially concretizes any human society always leaves some trace of its social relations and values in what it used, traded, worshipped...(see Roberto da Matta. Relativizando: Uma introduccion à antropologia social. Vozes, Petropolis, 1984, p.31

5. See Ivone Gebara, op. cit. p. 38

6 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. "But She Said". Boston, Beacon Press, 1992, p.5

7. Amy Hollywood. "Deconstruction" in Dictionary of Feminist Theologies. Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, p. 61-62

8. William R. Jones. "Is God a White Racist?" - A Preamble to Black Theology. Boston, Beacon Press, 1998, p. 76

9. Silvia Regina de Lima Silva. Consulta sobre teología y sociedad civil: implicaciones eclesiológicas. Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano. San José, 1995.

10. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, op. cit., p. 199-200

11. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. "Bread not Stone". Beacon Press, 1984, p.14

12. ibid. p.81

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WCC Language Service

ETHNICITY AND RACISM

By Steve Fenton

Ethnicity and racism are not, on first inspection, the same order of sociological concepts. The concept of ethnicity refers to the way in which social and cultural difference, language and ancestry combine as a dimension of social action and social organisation, and form a socially reproduced system of classification. The term racism refers to ideas which claim to classify different races and view these races as fundamentally different and unequal; and it refers to the reproduction of a racialised system of inequality itself (Fredrickson 1988, Miles 1989). In its concrete form ethnicity refers to the social mobilisation of ethnic ties and the social significance of ancestry, language and culture. We may speak of ethnic groups – identifiable groups whose "actual" or "claimed" shared ethnic attributes mark them off within a social system. But we should not think of these groups too concretely; they are not discrete, permanent or fixed.

As we have argued, the "cultural stuff" of ethnicity is grounded in social relationships. In a more or less conscious way, it is a feature of daily practice. This cultural content – the shared ancestry, the claims to a shared inheritance, the common customs and language – is also used or "drawn upon" by ethnic group members, to give substance to an ethnic label. It may be drawn upon, too, by those who do not belong and do not share the cultural inheritance – that is, to mark them off from us. In Malaysia, the "cultural stuff" of ethnic difference is grounded in social relationships, in the sense that there are differences of custom and practice between Malays and Chinese and Indians which are reproduced in everyday life. The majority of Malays speak Malay and many of them also speak English; relatively few speak Chinese or Indian languages. The Malay Islamic practice of eating only halal meat restricts the possi-bilities of shared eating and, as Nash (1989) suggests, the shared table – commensality – is the basis of much social exchange and solidarity. Modes of dress are characteristically different, social circles are often intra-ethnic, and intermarriages are uncommon. These differences are what we may regard as "grounded" cultural differences, routine patterns of behaviour and preference reproduced in the day-to-day social practice of Malaysia. Differences of personal style, marriage preference and of food and dining customs combine to define ethnicity at this micro-social level:

> In addition to Melayu as a mother tongue, a style of comportment, called *halus* (refined) is alleged to be Malay. This *halus* style is seen in polite social interaction, a consciousness of deference to age, status, piety, and other socially valued personal characteristics. (Nash 1989, p. 33)

Islam and Malay ethnicity correspond directly; being Muslim is part of the definition of being Malay. However the nature of being Muslim is contested – between more and less "fundamentalist" for example – and there are Muslims in Malaysia who are not Malays, being Arab, Pathan, Indian or Pakistani (Nash 1989). Although some of these Muslims may intermarry, for the most part Islam forms a hard boundary between Malay and Malaysian Chinese and Indian. Religious food codes also serve to harden social lines of demarcation:

> Along with the boundary mechanism of endogamy among categories is the virtual bar to commensality. Eating together is the closest form of interpersonal intimacy, and is often a metaphor for connubium, common substance and common origin. The Muslim code of halal-haram separates Chinese from Malay [and] this code prohibits so many of the ordinary foods of the Chinese that Malays cannot dine in a Chinese home or restaurant. Chinese restaurants must post halal signs if they seek Malay custom. (Nash 1989, p. 36)

At the same time as forming organising principles of everyday life, these cultural preferences are mobilised as ethnic markers. In Malaysia, the Malay language, the religion of Islam, and indigenousness, claimed by Malays as against Chinese and Indians who are portrayed as in-migrants despite their long presence in the country, have all been used to signify the distinctiveness of Malays and to underline their political claims.

Ethnicity as "invented", ethnicity as "grounded": the French-Canadian example

The social process of making ethnicity significant is part of a constant interplay. This is an interplay between those who belong, "us", and those who look on, "them". Historically, the basis of claims made about ethnicity in 20th-century Canada lies in over 200 years of the French presence in what is now

Canada. The "cultural stuff" of modern ethnicity resides in the customs, the social styles, the language and the loose though plausible claim to be descendants of a common stock – the earliest French settlers in Canada (Handler 1988).

A grounded historical accretion of culture, language and ancestry is to be found in the long experience of French speakers in Canada. This experience has been shaped by the influence of the Catholic Church, and until recently the largely rural and small town context of French Canadian life, and by the close proximity of the border with the USA (Handler 1988).

In the historical resolution of the French-English struggle for control of Canada, the victorious British made provision for the social and cultural autonomy of the French in Canada. This autonomy was always hedged about by the actual economic and political and, for the most part, numerical superiority of the British in Canada. For a long period the French were on the one hand "permitted" to retain their "Frenchness within Canada" but were in a broad sense subordinated to Anglo-British (Protestant) domination of Canada. As French Canadian political awareness grew in the 1960s and thereafter, a struggle has ensued about the place of French Canadians in Canadian society. In this process the French Canadians make claims about themselves (that is about "us") and these claims are made to at least two audiences – French Canadians or "potential" French Canadians, those likely to identify with Frenchness, and English-speaking Canadians. Meanwhile, English speaking Canadians make "defining statements" about French Canadians (Vallieres 1971).

Ethnicity requires this team collaboration even if the co-players are not so friendly. In Eriksen's phrase (1993b), to think of ethnicity as anything other than a relationship is like "thinking of one hand clapping". The English speakers also have at least two audiences: themselves ("this is who we are and this is what we are like") and the French Canadians ("that is who you are" and so on). The cultural stuff, the shared language, ancestry and customs, is given a certain significance, it is shaped, it is selectively drawn upon – but it is not entirely "made up" or invented. There is a real historical social process from which French-Canadian ethnicity derives; at the same time it is always being constructed and reconstructed in its contemporary social significance. In the last three decades this French Canadianness has increasingly found expression in the pursuit of a large measure of autonomy for the province of Quebec. What was once "French Canadian" is now politically "Quebecois"; the search for recognition of French culture and language within Canada has moved towards autonomy or independence for the province of Quebec as a nation or as a "distinct society" (Taylor 1992).

As "French Canadianness" or "being Quebecois" is politically constructed, the historical and contemporary materials are drawn upon to "colour in" the picture of ethnicity. The threat to the purity and survival of the French language, the portrayal of Quebecois or French-Canadian culture as less selfish and materialistic than English culture, the deter-

Aymara women from Bolivia Photo: Salgado Junior

mined promotion of music, dance and custom (Handler 1988) are all part of a picture of a French-Canadian culture threatened with submersion in a surrounding Anglophone sea. Provincial Quebec influence over education within the province and the ability to pass laws intended to preserve the use of the French language demonstrate how a state-like bureaucracy can use its powers to shape the meso-institutions of a society – the schools and universities which are important reproducers of culture.

Thus French-Canadian identity is both constructed in the sense of being politically reshaped and historically grounded. French Canadianness is constantly being invented and reinvented, but it is not simply an invented ethnicity; it is grounded in the historical and present experience of a population who have some basis on which to call themselves a people. In this sense, ethnicity diverges from "race" in that the very logic which the concept race refers to is a discredited race science. This is represented by the claim of natural biological divisions of humankind which were believed to be the basis of differences of culture and civilisation (Kuper 1975). There is no parallel in the concept of ethnicity to the "error" basis of the concept of race.

Roma people in Mitrovica Photo: Peter Williams, WCC.

"Race" as mistaken science

Race has been described as the phlogiston of social science, phlogiston being the substance invented in the minds of scientists prior to a proven understanding of combustion. The error base of the concept of race lies in the fact that for much of the 19th and 20th centuries the term race was taken to mean discrete divisions of humankind with visible characteristics marking those divisions. This classification was combined with the idea that races had characteristics of temperament, ability, and moral nature, which constituted a racial inheritance. Race was seen to be a "natural" – in scientific terms "biological" – grouping of human populations and the primary determinant of civilisation.

Theories of the inheritance of character and moral stature as a set of racial traits were entirely speculative and most race thinking was produced before our present understandings of genetic transmission. Indeed much race science preceded Darwin's theories of evolutionary development which in principle undermined the idea of fixed racial types (Banton and Harwood 1975, Banton 1977). To a large extent in biological science and in sociology the term race has fallen into disuse or is surrounded by quotation marks to show that it is not something real, one notable exception being academic – and political – discourse in the USA.

The physical signs, of skin colour and other physical features, which were used by race scientists – and by race thinkers of many kinds – are visible and real. There are, unevenly spread over the globe, clusters of populations with notable differences of skin colour, hair form, eye form and other facial features. What is erroneous is the assertion that these are the bases of discrete races of humankind with social and moral characteristics which are grounded in their biological difference (Kuper 1975).

Racialisation is the social process of conferring social significance on these visible markers. Racialisation is the process of making physical differences into social markers and, typically, enforcing them in a regime of oppression.

The falsity lies in the unambiguous description of physical types as "races" which are then viewed as having common attributes as a consequence of their shared race. But it is clearly not false to say that there are characteristic differences in appearance loosely clustered in populations spread over the globe. And it is clear that these appearance characteristics are one of the bases on which people socially distinguish themselves from others, whether voluntarily or by compulsion of others. People who are designated as being of this or that "group"on the basis of physical distinctiveness come to share a common social experience: complex though it is, there is a social reality underlying what it means to be white or black in America. None of these social realities runs counter to the view that race as understood for most of the concept's recent history comprises a significant falsehood, which means that the term race cannot be brought into play as an analytic or descriptive sociological term.

In Miles' summation:

> It was generally concluded after the Second World War that the scientific conception of "race" grounded in the idea of fixed typologies and based upon certain phenotypical features such as skin colour and skull shape does

> not have any significant scientific meaning or utility. Moreover it was concluded that there is no causal relationship between physical or genetic characteristics and cultural characteristics. (Miles 1989, p. 37)

People who are designated as belonging to a "race" come, as we suggested earlier, to share experiences as a consequence of this social process of designation. In many respects, the USA invented the category "Black" as a social marker of primary significance and Americans constructed a whole social edifice around the binary divide of White and Black (Fredrickson 1981, 1988). This lasted in one form – racialised slavery – through slavery to its end in 1865, in another form – racial segregation and oppression – up to 1954 and the beginnings of the dismantling of a system of social segregation, and in a third form in present day America where racial categories are highly contested and embraced by those who have been disadvantaged in racialised America. In America, the idea of race became the leading social marker, almost the defining feature of American social structure (Kymlicka 1989). Over centuries of shared experience, communities of Black people in the USA gave rise to a new ethnicity or series of ethnic claims and cultures. As Goldberg has argued, the idea of race became an element of American culture, first mobilised by Whites as an instrument of oppression, and subsequently claimed by many black African Americans as a counter-hegemonic symbol of unity and peoplehood (Goldberg 1993).

Despite the overwhelming power of Whiteness in America, enforced against Black Americans by violence and coercion as well as by the routines of a racialised society, Black African American ethnicity has been expressed as a voluntary social and political project, and in many ways. The terms African and Black have been embraced, Black as an expression of unity and pride, African as an expression of peoplehood.

This shift from an unmistakably imposed racialised system to an expression of ethnic communality suggests that processes typically described as racialisation and processes typically described as "ethnicity"or "ethnicisation" have much in common. There is reference to "them" (or "us") as a distinct people, reference to ideas of ancestry and "inheritance" and the use of social markers as setting the limits and styles of relationships between groups or between individuals viewed as group members.

"Ethnic" as the generic term

Since the term "race" suffers from its history of mistaken science, there are good arguments for making "ethnic" the generic term of which ideas about "race" may be taken as a sub-set. Gellner (1983) and Eriksen (1993b) treat it in this way. In Gellner's case he is discussing how ideologies are developed in the demarcation of "rulers and ruled, privileged and underprivileged" and the way in which ethnic elites "justify" their dominant position. An ideology of dominance which supports an ethnic elite, he argues "may seize on language, on genetically transmitted traits (racism), or on culture alone" (Gellner 1983). Similarly Eriksen suggests that "since ethnic ideologies tend to stress common descent among their members, the distinction between race and ethnicity is a problematic one. Ideas of "race" may or may not form part of ethnic ideologies" (Eriksen 1993b). In many, maybe most, instances the ideas of racial and ethnic difference are found side by side. In the American case, the concept of the WASP, as the dominant ethnic group in America's recent history, expresses both themes. In the term White Anglo-Saxon Protestant there are racial (White), ancestral (Anglo-Saxon) and cultural or religious (Protestant) components which are juxta-posed. In trying to sustain an analytic distinction we are prisoners of conventional or customary usage. In academic discourse (see Rex and Mason 1986, Barot 1996), "racism" is more common than "ethnic ideology"; in popular and newspaper usage the terms race and ethnic are often used interchangeably even in the same sentence (see the *Guardian* report on the British Census, 1997a).

Just as terms which are part of a racist categorisation (Black) may be embraced in a movement of liberation from oppression, so a term which is ethnic or ancestral in its reference to country of origin may take on the characteristics of a racist categorisation. In Britain, the term "Pakistani" has its origins in migration, it has cultural connotations in the close association with Islam, and is willingly adopted by community leaders. But at the same time the word Pakistani and, more so, "Paki" is used as a derogatory term by Whites and in a way that has little connection with the meaning of Pakistani for those who willingly claim it.

If it is difficult to give a final meaning to these related terms it is certainly possible to be clear about connotations which are relatively enduring. The term race is associated with mistaken science, it connotes physical difference and, frequently, colour. It is typically seen as malign, and racial ideologies have been associated with compulsion and regimes of oppression. By contrast, ethnic can be taken as an analytic term in social science, is often seen as the voluntary identification of peoples, and as (at least potentially) benign. The malign-benign distinction has been most clearly transgressed in the use of the term "ethnic cleansing" in the Yugoslavian civil war and this term has come into general usage in contexts where "racial discrimination or segregation" might have been used. •

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INTER-RACIAL CHURCH COMMUNITIES

By Rev. Marjorie Lewis-Cooper

In 1997, the United Reformed Church (URC) in the United Kingdom embarked on an adventure in mission. It received a missionary from Jamaica through the Council for World Mission (CWM) to work as multi-racial, multi-cultural development worker for a period of three years, Ms Marjorie Lewis-Cooper. She was interviewed by the URC and we have extracted parts of this interview for *Echoes*.

So what *is* the problem that needs to be tackled?

The sin of racism is unfortunately a reality – not only in the wider society but within the Church. People have been hurt and have experienced racism; in fact some of the people that went into the so-called "Black led" churches were actually from more traditional churches but when they came over in the 50's they where not made welcome. We have also the data collected by the Equal Opportunities Committee which shows that the percentage of Black people in the leadership of the URC is smaller than the percentage of Black people in the membership, so we have a problem. I think the problem does not only have to do with overt racism but it has to do with institutional blocks with the way power is used. I would say in some cases there is a lack of effort to make sure that everyone is included.

So there is a problem and we need to be able to identify how this prejudice plus power – which is a kind of raw definition of racism – is played out in the church, to name it as the evil it is and to move towards removing that evil from our midst.

I don't want to suggest that our problems are easy. There are things that will have to be worked through, some of them seemingly trite, like peoples' preference for liturgy. Some people like lots of singing and hand clapping and others are quite incensed by the thought that there would be any sound above a murmur in church or any kind of emotional expression. So there are a lot of things that we are going to have to negotiate but we need to understand that if we accept that we are all made in the image of God then it is not enough to accept it in *theory*; we have to work actively for the establishment of the reign of God, including in the church.

How much is the problem a cultural difficulty that churches find it difficult to make room for people who have different preferences in worship?

I think the racism is the more serious problem because many of the churches in the colonies have basically the same kind of liturgy. But I would say that there are also cultural problems, not so much in terms of overt racism, but people just not making the effort. They say "well they don't stay to morning coffee, they just come to worship and they go away" rather then making the effort to reach out to those minority elements who come in quietly to worship and just slip away. I think the first place we need to start is meaningful encounters finding spaces where people can hear and experience each other as people and not as stereotypes.

Given what you say about the presence of racism in the church, it's a wonder that Black members have bothered to stay with a mainstream White church.

At least two people have raised with me questions on those lines. One person, not somebody from the URC, felt that the only authentic place for a Black person was in a Black majority church. Someone else raised with me a pastoral concern that perhaps it would be just too discouraging for a Black person in majority White congregation. I have problems with

both those approaches because I believe that we were called to be one and that is not just interdenominational rhetoric but it means across *all* the boundaries –Jew and Greek, male and female and so on – and that includes interracial divides. I see differences in culture and ethnicity as rich resources: different gifts brought by individuals and by groups for the enrichment and the building of the church. I also think it's very important for us if we are to witness to the world that we have to show the signs of the Kingdom in all churches and one of those signs is a congregation in which different races can worship or a congregation in a single ethnic community which reaches out and has contacts in a meaningful way with congregations and peoples of other ethnicity both here in the UK and overseas.

What is it about an ordinary church member who is not making the effort to welcome the stranger? What is the root of that: is it fear, is it discomfort?

I hesitate to answer because it's complex and it may not be the same for everybody. I think we have been socialised through schools, our parents, the media – in all kinds of ways, including the Church. How often in Sunday school would people have seen pictures of Jesus and his angels as nice blue eyed blond cherubs and the devil and his angels as Black people? People have been socialised in all kinds of overt and subtle ways. I think it's also ignorance, because a lot of people have not had meaningful contact. What they know of people from ethnic minority groups is the distortion in the newspapers which says they are criminals, they are drug smugglers, they've come to live of the welfare system – those kinds of stereotypes. So I think there is fear of the unknown, there is ignorance and generations of programming that combine to make people behave this way.

How have you found the task so far?

I would say that I am quite impressed by what is already happening in the URC. I think a lot is already happening but it hasn't been given its politically correct label of "multi-racial multi-cultural whatever". I think to a large extent individuals and congregations are soldiering on in their different areas without others knowing about it. Maybe if we can get this documented, other people in the church who want to develop their own programmes could know where the expertise is, which would really help.

Many churches might say "We don't have any coloured members and there aren't many coloured people in our area". What do you say to them?

I think there are a range of options for involvement both within the UK and outside. We have the Jubilee 2000 campaign which is an important campaign for people in the developing countries. We have some rather alarming statistics about the suspiciously high proportion of Black people who are diagnosed as schizophrenics; the high proportion of Black people in the penal system; their absence in the police force. I would say there is scope for involvement with such justice issues. Some churches have been twinned with other congregations, perhaps in communities with more Asians and Africans and Caribbean people, so there is a range of things that can actually be done. Then again we are a tradition that believes in the priesthood of all believers and a number of people in so-called White congregations are teachers, policemen and women, civil servants and health service workers and they are meeting on a day to day basis with people from African, Asian and Caribbean origins. What is the nature of their ministry and their mission as Christians at that place of work? So I think that there are different options and it doesn't necessarily mean that each congregation will have the exact same programme. There is space for everybody to be involved.

Rev. Marjorie Lewis-Cooper

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"qa ch'af'al"

Rio de Janeiro DECLARATION

Representatives of Indigenous Peoples and Black people, pastors and bishops and lay members of churches from various parts of the world, met in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 23 to 28 November 1999. Their objective was to analyse how racism and discrimination are understood today, and to define effective means of making the rights of individuals, peoples and groups affected be fully respected by States, governments and societies.

After having heard, analysed and discussed a variety of issues, we express our concern about:

1. Our profound indignation with regard to the current conditions in which the Indigenous Peoples and Black people of Brazil live. They are stripped of their land and natural resources and when they defend themselves, are unjustly repressed by the State and local landowners, while companies implement projects that harm their lives and environment. Another serious issue is that the State does not recognise them as full citizens. We urge the authorities, society and federal governments of Brazil to take urgent measures to end the abuses of these peoples' rights, so they can live in peace and develop their communities.

2. The implementation of neoliberal policies, economic globalisation and privatisation policies are leading to an accelerating impoverishment and degradation of the conditions and dignity of women, Indigenous Peoples, the Black people and the poor in most countries of the world.

3. Many States and governments continue racist and discriminatory policies which have the effect of oppressing, marginalising, exploiting Indigenous Peoples, Black people and women. Only the form has changed, becoming more sophisticated than in previous decades, but the results are the same: the destruction of life, identity and dignity of citizens, especially those groups and peoples that are vulnerable to impositions of any kind.

4. We support a stand of resistance and adopt the right of Indigenous Peoples anywhere in the world to oppose economic, political, social, cultural, educational and other projects that destroy life, territory, natural resources and the environment in general.

Governments and policy-makers must be reminded that we have entered a new stage of relations and that oppression and repression does not contribute to peace, democracy and development. Racism and discrimination are practices that divide, putting us into confrontation with each other, which benefits no one.

The signatories of this Declaration make an urgent call to all governments and States in the world to begin or, when that is the case, to continue, legal and constitutional reforms. To take decisions in conjunction with their Indigenous and Black people and women to seek solutions to the serious problems that directly affect them.

Finally, we urge the churches, of all origins, whether local, national or world councils to work with Indigenous Peoples, women and Black people and with any other oppressed people in their process of struggle in the recognition and full respect for their specific rights.

Rio de Janeiro, 28 November 1999.

The Special Fund to Combat Racism,

an opportunity for you to contribute

The WCC's Special Fund to Combat Racism has a unique place in the history of the WCC. For over thirty years contributions to the Fund have been distributed to groups and organisations of the racially oppressed, anti-racism groups and support organisations. To date US$14 million has been allocated, in over 1400 grants in 50 countries.

From its inception the Special Fund was seen as the public expression of the WCC member churches' commitment to eradicate racism. In its early years the regular grants to liberation movements in Southern Africa were a source of controversy and fierce debate among the member churches.

The number and size of the annual grants depends entirely on the number of church, public and private donations received during the year. Applications for grants from the Special Fund can be made to the Justice, Peace and Creation team no later than the 31st of May each year (this year the deadline is set for 31st of July, exceptionally). The approved list of grants is announced in December.

Financial contributions to the Special Fund can be sent to:
Postal cheque account – Compte de chèques postaux: Genève 12-572-3 or
Union de Banques Suisses (UBS) SA, C.P., 1211 Geneva, Switzerland
Swiss franc account no.: 695.149.00A
US$ account no.: 695.149.60X

Please mention: donation to the Special Fund to Combat Racism

Community educators present the suffering of the Dalits through a drama in Kanglvakam, a Dalit village about 45 km south of Chennai/Madras. Photo: Peter Williams, WCC.

ECHOES asked two groups who have received a grant to recount something of their work and experiences.

A Public Apology

Six months ago, unorganised Dalit women of Iverkala, India, celebrated a public apology of an accused Nair (upper class) youth. The incident happened as follows: Mrs Jainamma is a 28 year-old mother of two children and wife of Mr. Luke. On October 10, 1999, before dusk, she went to a nearby junction to purchase some food for her family. The shop is approximately half a kilometre from her house. Both sides of the road are covered by the rubber plantation of a Nair landlord. When she crossed the road, suddenly a Nair youth, who belongs to the nearby place, attacked her. He gagged her mouth and dragged her into the rubber plantations with the intention to rape her. The helpless Dalit woman struggled and tried to escape from his hands. Her clothes were torn. By chance the gag on her mouth released a little so she cried out loudly. When hearing this cry some people came from the junction towards the darkness of the rubber garden. He then pulled down the lady and he ran away. Meanwhile a political rally, on the victory of the general election to the parliament, was passing by. The wretched man mingled into the crowd and began to shout slogans.

However, a police van was watching the rally. Quite soon, with the help of some Dalit youths, the Nair was caught by the police. However, some hours after, he was released with the help of some political leaders and with the influence of the police because he was upper caste and rich.

Both the ruling and opposition parties tried to rescue him from the case. The Savarnas (the upper class) turned against the Dalits but the Dalit women joined together and denied their traditional leadership. They protested against the attacks and threats. They filed complaints against the accused and protected the victim. Again the police took the man under their custody.

The case moved fast; the entire upper class supported the accused including some of his relatives who are eminent political leaders. They offered money and things to the poor woman for withdrawing the petitions. Jainamma and her friends bravely decided to move ahead.

In the meantime a local church vicar intervened. Finally the accused Nair fellow and his supporters gave in before the determination of the Dalit women.

According to the terms of the conciliations he was released and agreed to apologise on the evening of October 15, 1999, in front of the gate of the cashew factory at the time the women labourers went out for

tea break. The accused Nair made a public apology. First of all to the victimised women, to the Dalit community and to whole village. On hearing this all the women clapped their hands and cheered. Some of them cried because this was a first victory over caste domination and gender victimisation in this village. At the same time we, the team of the Dalit Development society, are also very proud of this victory, based on the information and empowerment given to these out-caste women.

Achamma John •

The Dalit Development Society of Iverkala, Kerala India was established in 1994 to support the work for the empowerment of Dalits especially in the are of discrimination based on colour. The main objective of the Society is to analyse the situation and problems of Dalits in the area, create awareness among them on the nature of exploitation and develop willingness to come together and act together.

CECUNE - Ecumenical Centre for Black Culture - one of the many bodies engaged in the fight against racism in Brazil

Based in the state capital of Rio Grande do Sul, in the extreme south of Brazil, the Ecumenical Centre for Black Culture (CECUNE) has been engaged in the struggle against racism in a region colonised for the most part by the Portuguese (Azorians), Germans and Italians. People of African descent represent around 11% of the population in this region and they face anti-Black racism which can be seen in the absolute efficiency of the mechanisms which render them socially invisible. For years no images of the Black population appeared in the media, their history in the region was not mentioned in school curricula, it was researched and documented with the same care as that of other ethnic groups. The social disregard led to very serious social consequences in the form of denial and exclusion and seriously damaged the civic rights and self-esteem of the population of African descent.

Given this state of affairs, a group of Black men and women decided to organise to take action in this society. They set up a small independent NGO run and maintained by volunteers, to carry out projects aimed at raising the self-esteem of the Black population. Its activities have been the following:

- publication and distribution of a newspaper specially for the Black community (in 1995 – 96) at a time when no such paper yet existed. Now the review Raça Brasil has been launched by a commercial publisher in the centre of the country and in effect serves as the magazine for Black Brazilians throughout the country.;

- in the field of formal education, promotion of courses, seminars, displays intended for African-Brazilian leaders, or aimed at Black communities through the "Free University" project which can count on the cooperation of more than twenty militant Black academics. The courses are always held in partnership with an official organisation belonging to civil society, which is responsible with CECUNE for issuing certificates. In the past three years the project has trained 44 students, 57% of whom were women and 99% Black, and 32 people active in the legal field, including lawyers, law students, public officials in the State Bureau for Justice and Public Security of RS, public promoters;

- in the field of the arts, CECUNE has its choir project which runs the State's only Black choir, with 22 singers (14 women and 9 men). The choir represents a special type of language in the struggle against racism, and is able to occupy spaces where another kind of language would not be heard.

CECUNE does not own assets and is maintained by the voluntary work of its members, by aid for specific projects received from international agencies, and by the alliances and partnerships it makes with organisations and bodies in civil society. It evaluates its work each year, makes any necessary corrections to its course and draws up new plans for action, always seeking to be sensitive to the demands of the Black community. •

2001: A United Nations Conference on Racism

When and where: The United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCR), a meeting of all UN member states, will take place from 31 August to 7 September 2001, in South Africa.

An NGO forum will precede it, probably 29 August – 2 September.

Previous world conferences on racism were held in 1978 and 1983 and the UN has adopted programmes of action for three International Decades to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination.

The First Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (1973-1982) provided a structure to focus on measures which should be taken to implement international instruments to eliminate racial discrimination and to launch a worldwide education campaign.

The Programme of Action for the Second Decade for Action to Combat Racial Discrimination (1983-1992) was proclaimed at the 1983 World Conference. It emphasised recourse procedures for victims of racial discrimination, a sweeping world public information campaign and the drafting of "model national legislation" to guide governments.

The Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (1994-2003) has been marked by a broadened view of the problem and the realisation that each society is affected by discrimination. The UN General Assembly urged governments to combat new forms of racism; discrimination based on culture, nationality, religion or language; and racism resulting from official doctrines of racial superiority or exclusivity.

Theme

The WCR slogan is "**United to Combat Racism: Equality, Justice, Dignity**". The conference aim is to ensure that international standards and instruments are applied in efforts to combat it. It could also formulate recommendations for further action to combat bias and intolerance.

The Conference's First Preparatory Committee (PrepCom), held from 1 to 5 May 2000, in Geneva, defined the following themes as a provisional agenda of the WCR.

1. Sources, causes, forms and contemporary manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

2. Victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

3. Measures of prevention, education and protection aimed at the eradication of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, at the national, regional and international levels.

4. Provision of effective remedies, recourses, redress, compensatory and other measures, at the national, regional and international levels. (The word 'compensatory' is in square brackets in the text, a UN way of signaling that there is no agreement on the use of this word).

5. Strategies to achieve full and effective equality, including international cooperation and enhancement of the UN and other international mechanisms in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and follow-up.

The PrepCom elected Ambassador(Madame) Absa Claude Diallo (Senegal) as its chairperson. Other members of the 'bureau' are Tunisia, Iran, Malaysia, FYR of Macedonia, Georgia, Brazil, Mexico (Rapporteur), France, USA and South Africa.

Planning

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (HCHR), Ms Mary Robinson, is responsible for preparations.

The HCHR NGOs Liaison is Ms. Laurie Wiseberg whose contacts are:

World Conference Secretariat United Nations, Room 4-025, Tel. 0041-22-917-9393, e-mail lwiseberg.hchr@unog.ch. The Website of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for general information on the WCR: http//www.unhchr.ch

An Inter-sessional open-ended working group will meet for five days at the end of January 2001, in Geneva, to develop the draft agenda, the draft declaration and the draft programme of action of the World Conference.

A Second PrepCom meeting: meet for two weeks at the end of May 2001, in Geneva, Switzerland. The exact dates will be decided by the Inter-sessional working group at its meeting in January 2001.

Regional Preparatory Meetings

Europe

10-11 October: Forum for Non-Governmental Organisations, Strasbourg, France.

11-13 October (afternoon): European Conference Against Racism: "All Different – All Equal: From Theory to Practice", Strasbourg, France

Participants will include:

a) The Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and Anti-Racism, Anti-Discrimination Working Group, represented by Ms. Pat White (a CCME Executive Committee member). Her e-mail is: pwhite@gw.hackney.gov.uk and telephone 0044 181 356 74 04. (To be confirmed by the Council of Europe).

b) Churches' Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ), represented by the Rev Arlington Trotman. His e-mail is arlingtontrotman@ctbi.org.uk , and telephone 0044-20-7523 2121. (To be confirmed by the Council of Europe).

Asia

28-30 August 2000, Teheran, Iran.

Africa

20 – 25 November 2000, Dakar, Senegal

The Americas

Date and venue not yet defined. Brazil, which was supposed to host the meeting, announced that it would not do so.

Expert meetings

organised by the Conference Secretariat:

Eastern Europe, in Warsaw

5-7 July 2000, on the theme "Protection of Minorities and Other Vulnerable Groups and Strengthening Human Rights Capacity at the National Level"

Asia, in Bangkok

5-7 September 2000, on the theme of "Migrant Workers and Trafficking of Persons, with Particular Reference to Women and Children"

Africa, in Addis Ababa

27-29 September 2000, on the theme "Preventing Ethnic and Racial Conflict",

Latin America, in Santiago

25-27 October 2000, on the theme "Economic, Social and Legal Measures to Combat Racial Discrimination, with Particular Reference to Vulnerable Groups"

Regional NGO Meetings:

The Conference Secretariat is planning four regional NGO meetings intended to feed into the NGO Forum. While the dates and venues have not yet been confirmed, the following are being planned:

- For Africa, a meeting in southern Africa
- For Asia, a meeting possibly in Colombo, Sri Lanka
- For Latin America, a meeting in Quito, Ecuador
- For Eastern and Central Europe, still to be determined.

NGO Participation and Coordination

NGO representatives who attended the first PrepCom meeting established a three-tiered coordination process: "NGO Coordination - WCR". The Contact person is: Deborah Robinson: drdrobinson@sprynet.com, Tel. (1-202) 723-5622, Washington DC, USA.

The three tiers are:

(a) NGO Planning Committee - This is a body open to any NGO that wants to participate. It communicates by e-mail.

(b) An NGO Coordination Committee comprised of:
12 NGO representatives from Africa
12 from Asia/Pacific and Middle East
12 from America
7 from Europe
7 from international NGOs.
A total of 50 plus some ex-officio representatives: 3 from South Africa, 2 from Senegal, 2 from Iran, 2 from France, and 2 from the Americas.

(c) A Facilitating Team of 12 members, to undertake specific tasks:
2 each for Africa, Asia/Pacific, Americas, Europe and Indigenous Peoples and 1 each for international NGOs, youth and Dalits.

An NGO secretariat will be established in South Africa. (The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights already has an office in Pretoria.)

(For matters related to Rules of Procedure and Accreditation of NGOs, link to the Conference Website http//www.hri.ca/racism, with links to many other sites dealing with racism).

Roger Wareham, of International Association Against Torture and December 12th Movement, and a member of the NGO Planning Committee (New York, USA), has shared with ECHOES his views on the First PrepCom meeting last May and the participation of NGOs.

"It was good that there was attendance by some community-based NGOs. A good spread of Africans from the Americas - Uruguay, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Honduras, US, Canada. Not enough from the Caribbean. There seemed to be a fairly good Indigenous representation. This is all relative. "Good" in this context is as compared to the usual representation at UN meetings. There still needs to be greater representation by NGOs from the African Continent.

It was very positive that the NGOs formed a Planning Committee, a Coordinating Committee (to formulate policy over the year) and a Facilitating Team to carry out the directives of the Coordination Committee. All members are temporary until the different groupings - regional, International NGOs and Indigenous - have regional meetings to secure permanent representation. November 1 is the deadline.

It is also very positive that the PrepCom approved NGO presence and participation in the working group meetings, as well as in plenaries. It is also positive that assurances have been given for the participation of non-Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) NGOs in the World Conference and PrepComs. But negative in that requirements for non-ECOSOC NGO participation are still very bureaucratic and restrictive (i.e. governed by ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31).

A key issue for NGOs will be the degree of effective participation by grassroots NGOs from the South and from the "South in the North."

The WCC contribution towards the WCR

The context

Racism has been a concern of the ecumenical movement for at least 70 years. However there has been a special focus on the issue since 1968 when the WCC Central Committee set up the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR). In 1998, during the VIIIth Assembly in Harare, The WCC celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Programme to Combat Racism.

In 1995, the Central Committee of the WCC noted that: "Institutional racism and the ideology of racism, in their most pernicious forms, continue unabated in contemporary societies and still affect churches dramatically while ongoing social, political and economic trends are producing new forms of racism."

In response to that challenge, the WCC's work on racism aims to engage and accompany the churches to recognise, to understand and attempt to overcome racism wherever it exists in their midst. WCC continues the effort to combat racism as a central part of the churches' life rather than something marginal. In this work, WCC tries to promote partnerships between Regional Ecumenical Organisations (such as the Christian Conference of Asia or the All Africa Conference of Churches) and national councils of churches which have programmes against racism, or which focus on racially/ethnically oppressed peoples, on Indigenous Peoples, Dalits, or women as victims of racism.

The Ecumenical Study Process on Racism

To understand and combat the old and new manifestations of racism in society and in the church, new analysis is needed. There is a need – and this is a difficult and challenging discussion – to identify oppressive, racist theologies. There is also an urgent need to understand the links, and distinctions, between racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, casteism and other "isms".

The Ecumenical Study Process on Racism, mandated by the WCC Central Committee, is a response to these needs. The Study has been carried out by the Justice, Peace and Creation (JPC) team. It will present its findings to the Central Committee, in September 2002, in a document which has been so far entitled "Understanding Racism Today". Beyond that the main objective of the study is to analyse its global and regional trends, and redefine the focus for work on racism and its specific strategies.

The Ecumencial Study on Racism is also WCC's contribution to the preparatory process of the World Conference and its participation in the Conference itself. To that end, the WCC will facilitate churches and partners being involved in the WCR regional conferences. WCC will also select an ecumenical delegation to attend the World Conference.

The JPC team, in cooperation with other church-related programmes against racism, as well as its partner organisations in civil society, expects to facilitate four regional/inter-regional activities as part of its own preparatory work for the World Conference. These processes will gather substantial information in terms of analysis and actions of churches and church-related organisations in response to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The inputs and analysis gathered in a regional/inter-regional preparatory process will be an important contribution to the final document of the WCC's Ecumenical Study Process on Racism ("Understanding Racism Today").

A full-time consultant will be employed to help coordinate and facilitate the organising of regional/inter-regional meetings and the activities of churches and partners.

SISTERS

SISTERS in the struggle to eliminate Racism and sexism

This section is dedicated to news from the SISTERS network. This network enables women to link up and exchange their experiences, generating solidarity, supporting one another through concrete actions. Its members come from churches as well as from groups and movements in civil society committed to eliminate racism and sexism.

sisters

News from the USA

By Sammy Toineeta

The New York City branch of SISTERS has had two highly successful meetings. The first one took place on Wednesday, October 6, 1999 and the second was Wednesday, March 22, 2000. We have also made plans for the third gathering to take place on Friday, June 9, 2000. The group decided at the March meeting that they would like to meet quarterly, at least for the upcoming year.

We were all quite pleased with the diversity of the women who met, both organisationally and racially. Representatives from the National Council of Churches, Church Women United, United Methodist Church and United Church of Christ attended both gatherings. We also had women who were African American, Latina, Asian and American Indian (Indigenous). We are looking to expand the network and enlarge the numbers at each gathering.

Even though the group enjoys such diversity, we have found that we are of one mind where racism in concerned. Concerns of the women were centred on institutionalised racism and classism particularly. Another great concern, which also reflects institutionalised racism, was that of public education for their children. Women were worried about the quality of education if they lived in predominately people of colour school districts; the kind of teachers those schools attracted; how lower quality education would impact higher education opportunities for their children as well as guns and violence within the schools. Guns and violence are one of the major problems in the United States today.

The women who met felt very comfortable that they were in a safe place. They have also decided that for now, they would like to have the meetings as un-

structured as possible, meaning that we would continue with open general discussion. Both the organisers of the meetings and those attending were pleased with forward motion and we look forward to an even larger gathering next time. •

Sammy Toineeta, is an Indigenous woman, working in the National Council of Churches USA, Racial Justice programme.

For more information on the SISTERS network, you can contact Marilia Schüller, Programme Executive of the Justice, Peace and Creation team for Combating Racism, email: mas@wcc-coe.org.

Women's Lives

An experience of working in Cali, Colombia

By Betty Ruth Lozana Lerma

Colombia is considered one of the most violent countries in the world. Expert reports analysing the phenomenon rarely take account of racism and discrimination as factors that generate violence. The *Asociación Espacio de Mujeres* (ASEMUS - women's space) has more than ten years' experience of working with the Black population in poor areas of the city of Cali, Colombia, and in particular with women in the district of Aguablanca, where 400,000 people now live, many of them in extreme poverty. In the shantytowns which make up the district of Aguablanca, a high proportion of the population is Black or Afro-Colombian, in some cases as much as 90%. They have come, and keep coming, from the Pacific Coast and the northern River Cauca area. The latter are people who have been obliged to abandon or sell their land under pressure from sugar cane producers, while those from the Pacific Coast are being expropriated as a result of free market policies which see the region as a strategic place and are aiming to turn it into the gateway which will make the country part of the famous Pacific rim, with its centres in Japan and the United States. This region is classed as backward and is therefore the focus of development. Its inhabitants are either ignored or treated as obstacles to change. In either case, they become the victims of progress. For more than ten years the neoliberal economy has been turning the country's Black population into a new category of displaced persons. Fleeing the violence and death their only resort is to migrate to the city, where they live uprooted from the land and their traditional ways of life.

Migration to the city erodes the traditional cultural values which ensured peaceful coexistence in their communities of origin, thanks to more horizontal social relations and the strengthening of ties through various cultural practices. In the city such things disappear – for instance, the festivals and events celebrating life and death, where the women organised and controlled both the secular and the religious phases. The men's part was generally confined to playing instruments. The religious aspect of these festivals is an amalgam of different elements of the Catholic tradition and others of African origin, converging in the mass, but without this being the central element. In the secular part, the community strengthens its social ties through the involvement of villages and localities, the formation of new relationships, courtship and love, communal amusement. In the city, the celebration is confined to the religious aspect, and this in turn is confined to the mass. Even the colours have disappeared in the dressing of the altars. Women have been deprived of the power they had in the religious life of their communities.

There are various forms of solidarity and mutual aid in Black communities, such as the exchange of a helping hand, or communal working (*minga*). The latter is the only form we found in the city and it is extended to women on their own in charge of a household, especially for tasks like building a house. If the woman has a husband the community does not help her, even though the husband is often like "another child to look after". The other forms of solidarity disappear because of growing individualism, even within the family.

It is "easier" for Black women to enter the labour market than Black men, because in the minds of the dominant White population they are less dangerous. Black women are forced to fit in with a cultural attitude that imagines them to be more directly and specifically suited for work in the city than men. Domestic service in the city is defined as Black women's work, although not all Black women are engaged in it. This attitude makes it difficult for them to find any other kind of job. For many Black women, contact with the upper and middle classes as domestic servants has meant they have quickly had to abandon many of their traditional customs and adopt the cultural patterns of their employers, as well as a series of behavioural codes required of them in carrying out their duties. Those who live in have to accept conditions of employment that allow them to go out only once a week or fortnight. The social recognition and respect the women had in their own communities is lost in the changed living condition in the city. The same happens with the symbolic representations

Displaced mother and child, el Chocó, Colombia
Photo: Paul Smith, Panos Pictures

of what it means to be a man or a woman.

When women speak about the problems that affect them most, they mention two things in particular: gang violence and domestic difficulties, among which a recurring theme is the husband's unfaithfulness, often involving a close relation (sister, cousin), and physical abuse. Violence of this kind becomes cruder in the cities, where the men let themselves go in "their vices of drinking and womanizing", as they say. If the women stand up for themselves they are left alone, because the men say they're "not going to live with another bloke". Many women come to the city with their children to get away from a violent husband. Women are responsible for their children's livelihood, because the children are their responsibility, not the men's. Women have gone from being the mainstay round their communities revolve to being heads of families, with all the burden of poverty this signifies in the city, where they have no kitchen garden, no means of production, no networks of solidarity. Moreover, the saying "one child is no child" still holds. To obtain social recognition in their milieu, Black women must have a numerous offspring, at a young age. With no other options in life, no chance of education or employment, motherhood is the only way for a woman to become a person of worth, capable of living up to the dignified and respectable woman-mother image prevailing in her culture. In the dominant imagination "Black women are in heat from the time they're girls".

Even in this desperate situation there are seeds of hope. We find groups of women trying to restore their traditional values, celebrating feast days, *bundes, chugualos, alabaos*[1]. In the shantytowns the women are the first to start efforts to improve living conditions for themselves and their children and for the community in general. Despite their heavy burden of work many of them still find the time to get some training that will lead to better opportunities, refusing the social conditioning that allocates them to domestic service or market stalls as the only option. There is also a quest for roots, a hunger to know about the past and be able to affirm their identity in it, a renewed appreciation of black as beautiful, especially among young people. In different parts of the country new spaces and new forms of expression have opened up for Black women to tackle their problems and aspirations, dealing with aspects such as restoring their culture, strengthening identity, protection of human rights and the rights of women, social organisation and participation, production, etc. At a local women's meeting last October we set up the urban Black women's network, with the aim of defending our rights and joining forces to produce and market the products of our income-generating organisations. The outreach of all these organisations in the rest of the country and the world, despite the centuries of invisibility to which we have been subjected, is the only hope for our continued existence as a Black people. •

Betty Ruth Lozano is a Colombian sociologist. She has worked extensively with impoverished women in Cali, Colombia, in the areas of popular education, strengthening their organisational skills and uplifting their cultural and ethnic identity . She plays an active role in the SISTERS network of the JPC team.

Notes:
1. Bunde is a dance that is part of the celebration of the dead; Chugualo, the celebration of the death of a little boy or girl; alabao, a song to religious images and the dead.

ecumenism and daily life:

a story from the gospel

By Silvia Regina

A challenge that faces us for the new millennium lies in recognising, appreciating and making the most of the diversities of gender, race, generation, nationality, religion and other that are part of our everyday experience. Diversity is not just to be tolerated but shared, enjoyed, celebrated. But the encounter with someone who is different, who is not part of our group, is always provocative and surprising and, especially when the difference is religious, it can mark us profoundly. This was so for Jesus, too, as we find in this story in Mark's gospel 7:24-30.

Mark tells us that Jesus was going to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. But then a foreign woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit came and bowed down at Jesus' feet, begging him to cast the demon out of her daughter. But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." The woman answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then Jesus said to her, "For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter." So she went home and found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

The region of Tyre mentioned in the text was a border zone inhabited by Jews and non-Jews, possibly a region of strong ethnic, religious, political and economic conflicts. Tyre was a large city and an influential trading centre. However, Jesus' meeting with the woman took place outside the city, in the countryside. The most surprising thing in the account is Jesus' attitude. Some commentators seek to justify it by singling out the woman as a member of the dominant class. Others suggest that Jesus wanted to test her faith. But for myself, as a woman, a mother and a member of a people subjected to racial and religious discrimination, I feel indignant at the harshness of Jesus' words and attitude. If we analyse the story we find that these two foreign women, a mother and her daughter, occupy the lowest place in the physical space presented in the text. They are not part of the children's table, mentioned by Jesus. Like dogs – a pejorative way of referring to Gentiles – they were to be under the table eating the crumbs that fell to them. The table of which Jesus speaks is not like the table of the poor, the Black communities, where there is always food in abundance. Nor does this seem like the same Jesus who multiplied the loaves and fishes. So what message can this text have for us?

The woman is not discouraged by Jesus' words. Like a watchful dog she does not let this opportunity pass. She seizes the morsel that falls to her, takes Jesus' very words between her teeth and turns them into a right for herself and her daughter. Jesus is surprised at her attitude and her words win him over. This is the only case in the gospels where Jesus does not have the last word in a conversation or a discussion. Instead, Jesus learns from the woman. He listens to her attentively, takes her words seriously and finally senses her pain and has a change of heart. Jesus changes his mind. A foreign woman challenges him and teaches him a lesson. He discovers a new opportunity to serve, which is, to serve these women who are not part of what he originally thought of as his people. The woman returned home and the girl was healed. The text tells us nothing more. Did the woman continue to follow her own religious tradition? Did she become a follower of Jesus? We do not know and it is not important. The important thing is faith, religious experience placed in the service of life. The important thing is that girls can be saved and enabled to grow and enjoy life.

This encounter at the frontier challenges the frontiers of Christianity today, calling it to service and dialogue with other religions. It also challenges us at the frontier between genders, inviting women and men to seek ways to reconstruct our identity in dialogue and reciprocity. Like Jesus, the men can also learn. Like the Syrophoenician woman, women can also discuss, provoke, challenge.

Jesus learned from a woman; let us learn with the woman and with Jesus to be open to the new, the liberating message brought by those who are not part of "our group". Let us learn that life, the commitment to living is the great force that breaks down barriers, that asserts itself and speaks louder than the doctrinal principles and denominational and institutional limitations that prevent the expression of solidarity and commitment to life itself. •

Silvia Regina de Lima Silvia is Brazilian, Roman Catholic, a teacher at the Latin American Biblical University (Costa Rica) and a researcher in the Ecumenical Studies Department (DEI), Costa Rica. She plays an active role in the SISTERS network of the JPC team.

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

Ethnicity – Racism, Class and Culture - *By Steve Fenton*

The phrase "ethnic group" is now part of daily news and political discourse. More ominously, the term "ethnic cleansing" has entered the language in the aftermath of the collapse of Yugoslavia. Despite phrases such as this, we often think of ethnic difference as benign – whether exemplified in food, dress or music. But is it? Are the kinds of sentiment that we call ethnic – or national – as potentially destructive as those we call racist? Are marches and drumbeats heart-warming traditional rituals or the signs of bitter division?

Many books on ethnicity and racism have concentrated on a single country; this book takes the reader through key analytical debates drawing on a range of case study material from around the globe, including: Britain and migration; America as a post-slavery society; Hawai'i as a land dispossession society; and Malaysia as a "plural" post-colonial society.

In doing so, it addresses the question of whether there is a universal resurgence of ethnicity and coolly assesses competing theories of ethnicity and racism. Providing the reader with a clear conceptual frame within which to see longstanding debates afresh, it will be of relevance and value to both students of a range of social sciences and specialists in the field.

Published by MACMILLAN PRESS LTD, © Steve Fenton 1999, ISBN 0-333-66225-3 Pb.

Ethnic and Racial Studies Today - *Edited by Martin Bulmer and John Solomos*

The teaching of race and ethnicity is now an important part of the core curriculum in a wide variety of social sciences and humanities subjects. In this important collection contributors to the leading international journal Ethnic and Racial Studies, together with colleagues from other disciplines, reflect on the ways in which race and ethnicity are being studied today. Drawing on the latest research, the authors provide a comprehensive account of key controversies and debates in many areas, including sociology, politics, social geography, cultural studies and philosophy, and pinpoint new directions in research and scholarship that are likely to shape the study, teaching and presentation of race and ethnicity well into the next century.

Published by Routledge © 1999 – ISBN 0-415-18173-9

Out of the Shadows - THE FIRST AFRICAN INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

Edited by Angeline van Achterberg

From 20 to 24 April 1998, the First African Indigenous Women's Conference was held in Agadir, Morocco. It was the first time that women of Indigenous Peoples from South, East, North and West Africa had come together to share their knowledge, experiences, and strengths.

The conference was initiated by the Netherlands Centre for Indigenous Peoples (NCIV) and the Moroccan association Tamaynut. It was the end result of a two-year process of consultations among African Indigenous organisations through visits, meetings, and letters. These consultations allowed us to define two subjects as core issues: These subjects are:

- The role of African Indigenous women as treasurers of the cultural and intellectual heritage of their people and,
- Violence against African Indigenous women.

Two minor subjects were also discussed:

- The legal situation of African Indigenous women in the countries they inhabit, and,
- Biodiverstiy and traditional medicine and African Indigenous women.

Published by The Netherlands Centre for Indigenous Peoples and International Books © 1998 – ISBN 90 5727 0269 in English and French.
Tel: +31-30-2731 840, Fax: +31-30-2733 614,
Email: i-books@antenna.nl

New Ethnicities and Urban Culture

RACISMS AND MULTICULTURE IN YOUNG LIVES - *by Les Bac*

How do young people express their sense of social identity in multicultural urban environments? How does racism enter into their lives, and to what extent are new forms of cultural dialogue being established? *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture* aims to answer these and other questions through an engaging and detailed examination of the lives and cultures of young people.

Drawing on extensive ethnographic research the author shows how new identities are emerging within hybrid forms of musical and cultural expression, and how these developments are being met by multiple forms of popular racism. The city provides a site for the most profound forms of trans-cultural communication, yet it also plays host to complex and elaborated forms of racial exclusion. *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture* examines the social basis of this metropolitan paradox.

As a grounded empirical analysis of the everyday lives of young people and as a fresh, challenging theorisation of the relationship between race, culture and identity, this study will be essential reading for undergraduate and post-graduate courses in race and ethnicity, cultural studies, urban sociology and social anthropology.

Published by University College London Press, © Les Back, 1996 – ISBN 1-85728-252-3 Pb

Race and Class

A JOURNAL FOR BLACK AND THIRD WORLD LIBERATION

Published quarterly by the Institute of Race Relations, *Race & Class* is the foremost English language journal on racism and imperialism in the world today. For more than two decades, it has established a reputation for the breadth of its analysis, its global outlook and its multi-disciplinary approach – with contributions from scientists, artists, novelists, journalists, politicians and Black and Third World activists and scholars. *Race & Class* covers: • Globalisation • The "new world order" • Refugees • Indigenous peoples • Debt • Popular culture • Culture and identity • Black politics, and much more.

As from January 2000 *Race & Class* is being published by Sage Publications for the Institute of Race Relations. A full list of available back issues with their contents is available online at www.homebeats.co.uk.

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

Debt and the Jubilee: Pacing the Economy
Dette et Jubilé: Imprimer un rhythme à l'économie

edited by Jean-Michel Bonvin

The closest definition of the Jubilee year is given in Chapter 25 of Leviticus: "Ye shall... proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof... Ye shall return every man unto his possession... A Jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed" (Lev. 25,10-11).

The Jubilee thus introduces a salutary break into economic logic and creates room for a different rhythm which takes fuller account of man's manifold dimensions. In a society which is obsessed with the notion of profitability, the Jubilee represents the time of man and the time of God. In this sense, it throws down a challenge which our age, like every other age, must take up. The Jubilee is essentially pragmatic in nature; it does not seek to deny reality, especially economic reality, but endeavours to bring it more into line with God's own plan. This gives it a force of inspiration with which it can mobilise followers of every religious tradition and every current of thinking that aims to promote social justice.

The Jerusalem symposium on "The Jubilee and its Economic and Social Implications" was organised in this spirit and gave rise to fruitful exchanges of views between philosophers, sociologists, theologians, historians and economists from both Jewish and Christian backgrounds. This book contains a summary of the symposium papers and was published in English and French.

168 pages, ISBN 2-9700232-0-2, January 2000, US$ 25 or CHF 40.-

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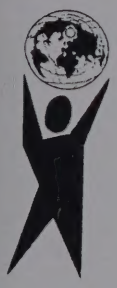

RESPONDING TO CONFLICT (RTC)
STRENGTHENING POLICY AND PRACTICE

Practical Strategies for Agencies Working in Areas of Tension and Conflict.
Workshop: 17-21 July 2000, Birmingham, UK.

A residential workshop for staff of international agencies with advisory or direct management responsibility for relief, development, rights and peace-building programmes. It is especially relevant for those engaged in the planning and implementation of programmes of humanitarian assistance, and for those concerned with developing policies for appropriate responses in complex political emergencies. This course has proved very popular, and was heavily oversubscribed in July 1999.

Objectives

Participants will:

- learn and practise a range of methods for understanding and analysing conflict
- learn about and critically appraise various approaches to evaluating the effect of programmes on conflict, including Do No Harm
- develop tools for assessing the positive and negative impacts of development and relief programmes on conflict
- use the above knowledge to reassess the impact of their programmes in areas affected by actual and potential conflict, and to identify fresh needs and possibilities
- learn about a wide range of methods for intervening in conflict, including negotiation and mediation, and explore how programme policies can support these as necessary
- explore ways in which their agency can integrate effective conflict prevention and peace-building into programme planning.

Responding to Conflict (RTC)

RTC is an international not-for-profit agency which provides practical capacity-building programmes to support people working for peace, rights and sustainable development in conflict-affected areas of the world. As part of its work to promote skills and strategies for peace RTC organises this course annually. Since the course started three years ago, participants have come from many agencies, including DfID, Oxfam, Quaker Peace and Service, International Alert, the European Centre for Conflict Resolution, the International Police Task Force at Sarajevo, the Zimbabwe Liberation War Veterans Association, the British Red Cross, Heritiers de la Justice, and the Progama de Promoçao da Paz; and from many countries including Sri Lanka, Sudan, the Philippines, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, The Netherlands and Northern Ireland.

Location

The workshop will take place at Woodbrooke, a Quaker Studies Centre in Birmingham, UK.

Fees

The fee for the workshop, inclusive of accommodation and food, is £650. Where participants are staying elsewhere and do not need bed and breakfast, the rate is £550.

Places

Numbers will be limited to 26 in order to maximise participation and the overall quality of the course. To guarantee a place please contact RTC for an application form as soon as possible.

For more information please contact:
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